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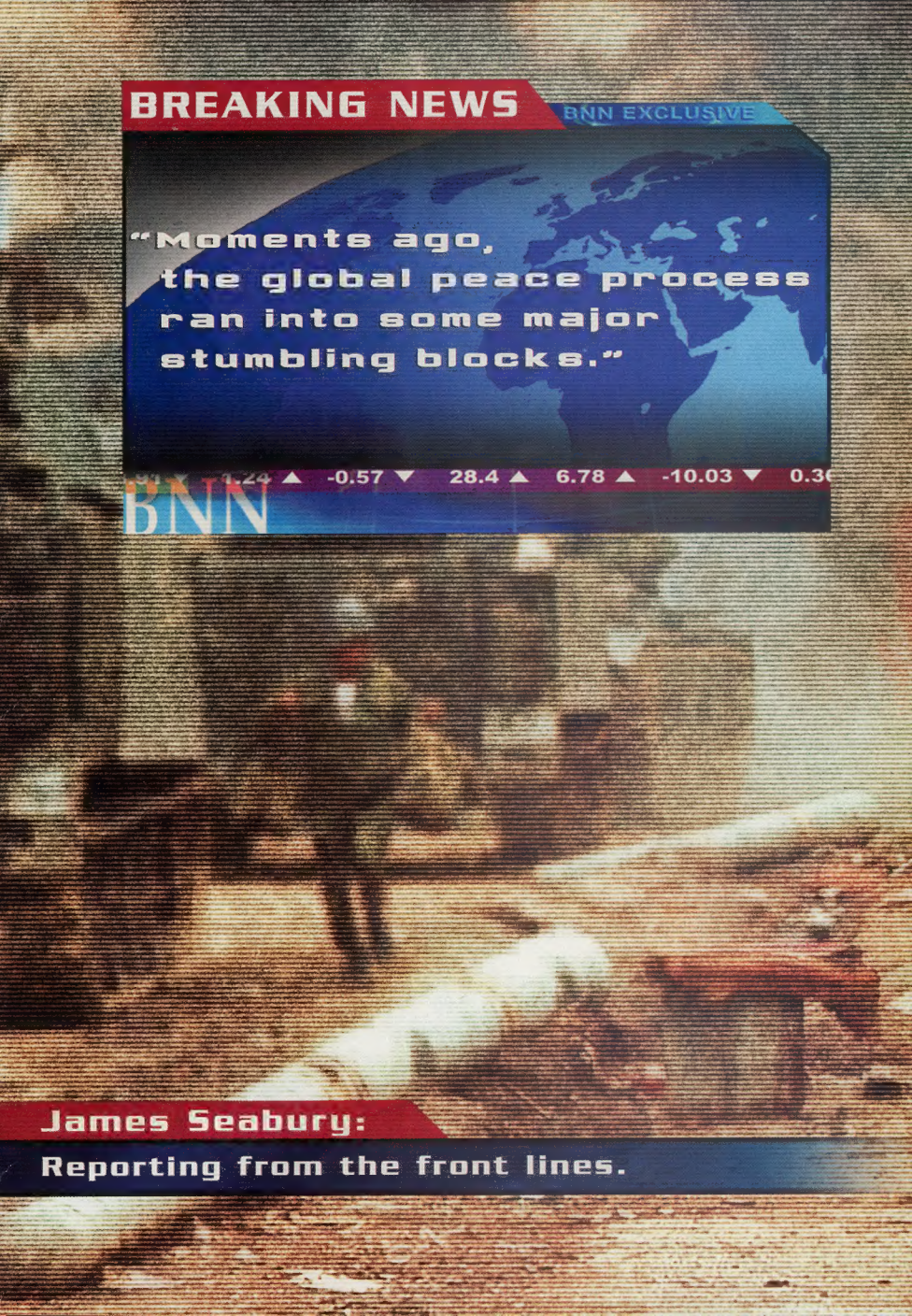
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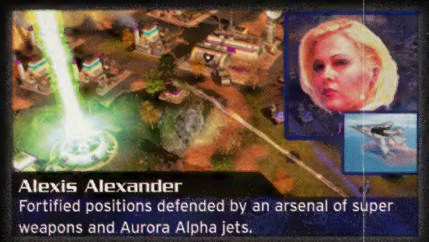
AUX - 4



Alexis Alexander
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AUX - 6

Prince Kassad
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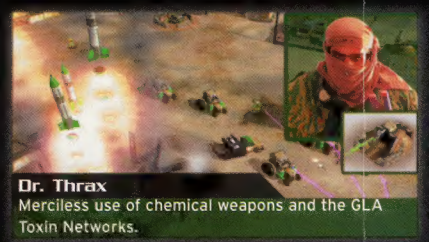

Dr. Thrax
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AUX - 8

Rodall "Demo" Juhziz
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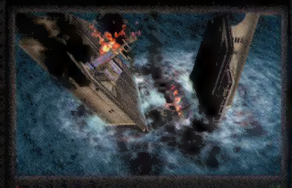

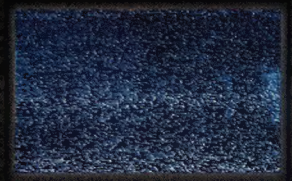

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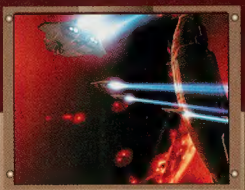

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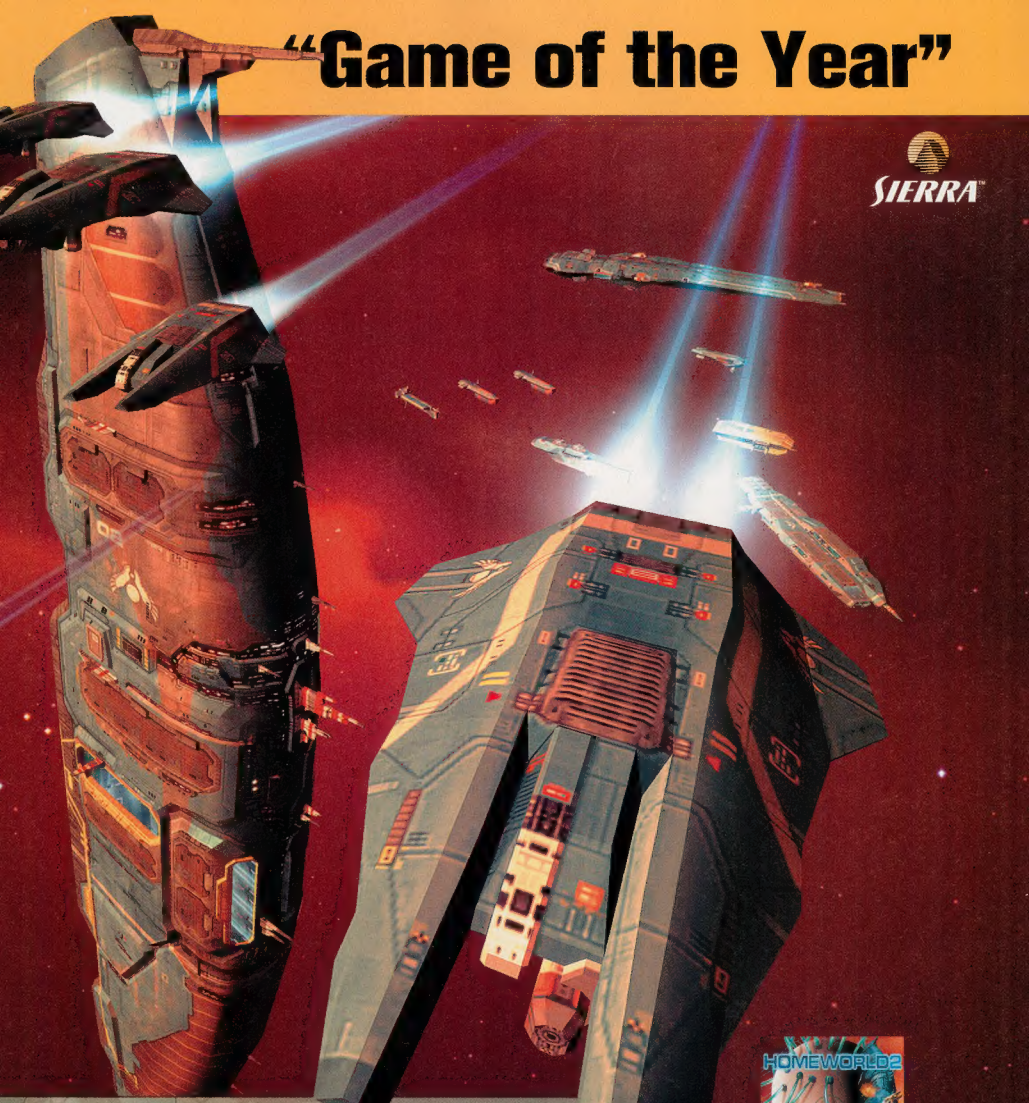

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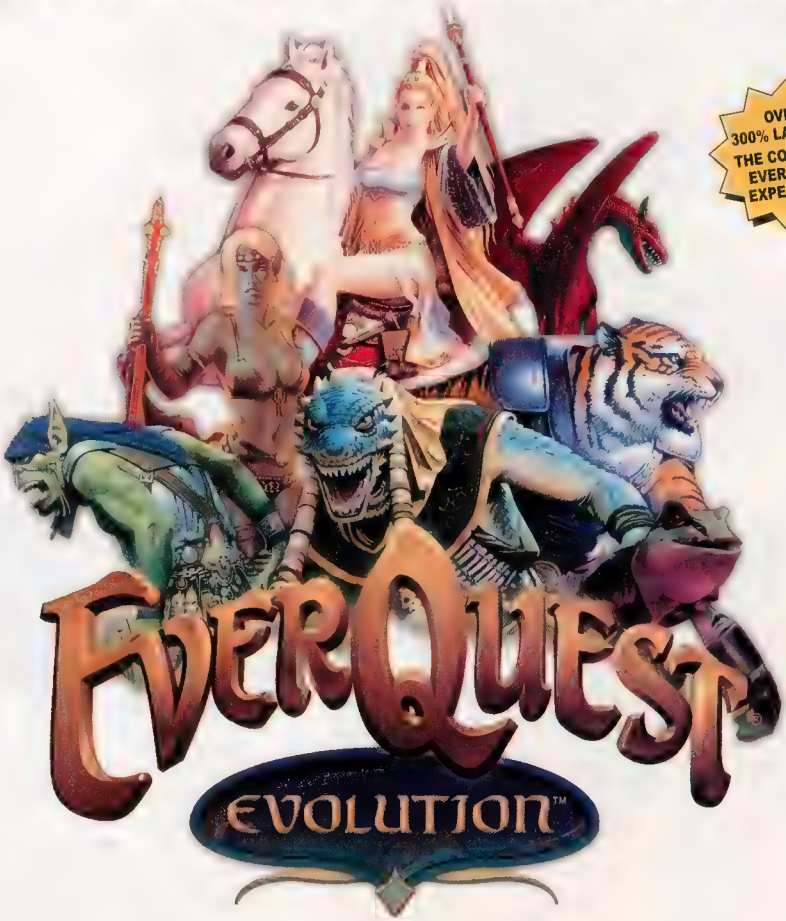

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October 2003 Issue #231

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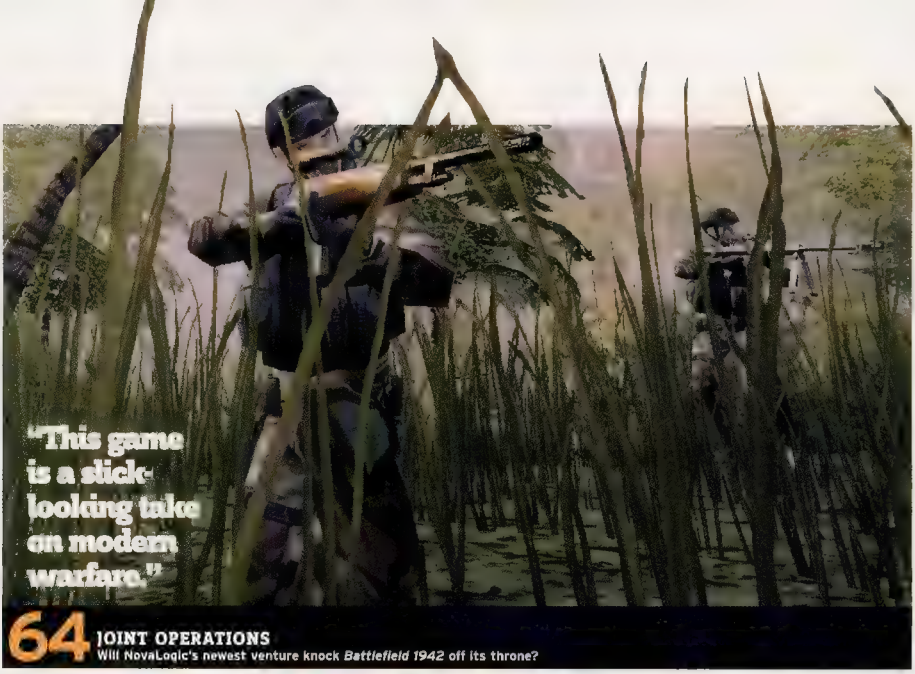

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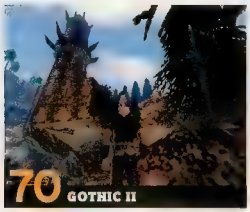
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One gaming machine to go, please.

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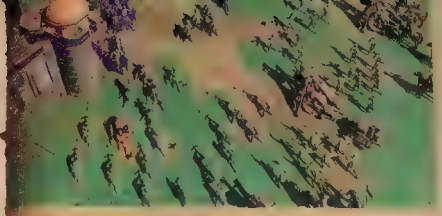

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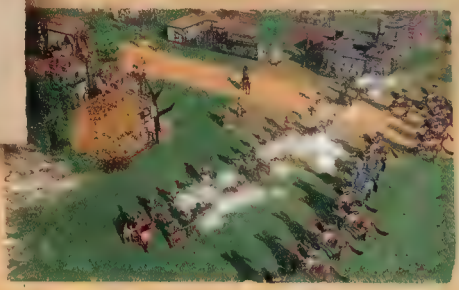

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Ghost Master
Exercise Your Demons
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Mild Violence
PC
CD-ROM
SOFTWARE

"We'll Always Have Wednesdays"

Our EIC cries in his pink lemonade over lost

It sucks to be me this month. OK, sure, it sucks to be me most months—what with my whole "I'm a dumbass" problem—but this month is particularly rough. Why? Because in one fell swoop, I am losing two of the best editors at this magazine: CD-ROM editor Di Luo and game industry legend and longtime *CGW* mascot Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen. Cue self-pitying violin music here.

Di, for some unfathomable reason, is leaving to go to graduate school, which means that during his year here he learned exactly nothing. We invest 12 months trying to turn this responsible achiever into a slacker like the rest of us, and he spits it back in our face with a hifalutin' graduate program. That's great, Di. If you'd prefer to "educate yourself" and "pursue a career" rather than sit on your ass and play games all day, be our guest. "Ambition" has no place in the gaming-magazine business; obviously, this wasn't the right place for you anyway. So good-bye.

And then there's Scooter. The ever-loquacious Robert Coffey takes time off from his usual hatred of everything to wax eloquent about Scooter in this month's Scorched Earth, and he said everything I wanted to say so much better than I ever could that I don't need to do so now. Still, I can't just let the moment pass. This is Scooter we're talking about. Scooter! His departure has left me in a state of befuddlement and loss. What does Batman do without Robin? What does the Skipper do without Gilligan? What does Sanford do without Son? All these questions come to mind as I ponder my post-Scooter *CGW* existence. For seven years, Scooter has been my trusty sidekick, donning matching day-glo tights with me as we have fought together to make a good gaming magazine and to keep America safe from a host of evil supervillains. I suppose I will have to go it alone now, as no one could hope (or want) to fill Scooter's tights, especially since he never washed them once in all those seven years.

"Ambition" has no place in a gaming magazine.

Scooter isn't going too far—just down the hall to our pals at *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*—and we wish the traitorous weasel all the best, with no lingering hostility or resentment. Actually, as he pointed out to me in an attempt to get me to stop crying, "We'll always have Wednesdays"—a touching reference to our traditional Wednesday lunchtime comic-book run. Of course, it did smack suspiciously of your standard insincere "we'll still be friends" breakup speech, and, in fact, Scooter did go buy comic books without me this very Wednesday, but I'm not worried. I'm gonna sit here by the phone right now and wait for his call.

Good luck, Di and Scoot. *CGW* won't be the same without you guys.

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief

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HOW TO CONTACT THE EDITORS
To contact any member of the staff: firstname_lastname@ziffdavis.com
Address nonsubscription-related questions and feedback to *CGW* Editorial, 101 2nd Street, 8th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105. Or you may contact us via e-mail: cgwletters@ziffdavis.com; phone: (415) 357-4900; or editorial fax: (415) 357-4977. Website: www.computergaming.com

ADVERTISING & SALES DEPARTMENT
Group Publisher **Lee Uniacke**
Associate Group Publisher **Stan Taigen** stan_taigen@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4915
Advertising Director **Marci Yamaguchi** marci_yamaguchi@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4944
District Sales Manager/ Bay Area Peninsula **Mary Gray** mary_gray@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8782
Account Executive/ Bay Area Peninsula **Aaron Gallion** aaron_gallion@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4925
Regional Sales Manager/ Southwest Territory **Julie Steelman** julie_steelman@ziffdavis.com (310) 379-4313
Regional Sales Manager/ Midwest Territory **Marc Callison** marc_callison@ziffdavis.com (630) 810-4095
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Account Executive/ East Coast Territory **Amy Mishra** amy_mishra@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8780
Online Sales **Bill Young** bill_young@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8453
Marketing Director **Rey Ledda** rey_ledda@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8775
Marketing Coordinator **Wayne Shiu** wayne_shiu@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8248
Senior Advertising Coordinator **Tipler Ubbelohde** tipler_ubbelohde@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4930
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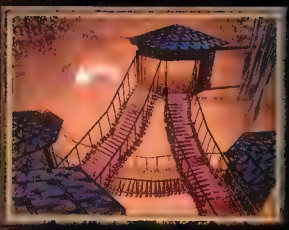
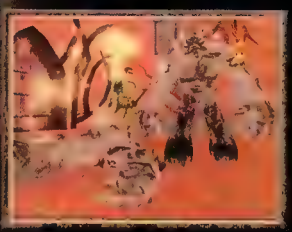
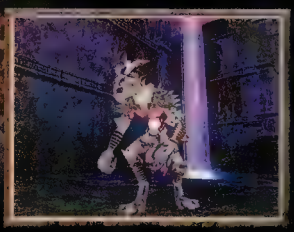
EverQuest

Lost Dungeons of Norrath







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THIERRY NGUYEN

traitor by leaving *CGW* and moving over to *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*. Just before taking away his PC, we made him write half of the *World of WarCraft* feature (it's the

ght, the princes of gaming, rayvings of CGW. Good night.

DI LUO

After being badgered by his mother for years to get a "real job," Di performs an act of filial sacrifice by leaving a dream job at *CGW* to attend graduate school. He is consoled by the fact that he will no longer have to rush to work at the ungodly hour of 11:00 a.m. and can return to his natural cycle of playing games till 4:00 a.m. and sleeping past noon.

DENICE COOK

A Massachusetts native of Canadian descent, Denice has been gaming since the days of *Pong*. She has also been trying to keep various cats off PC keyboards since the 1980s. When not

snorkeling, and getting crushed in *Monopoly* deathmatches by her 9-year-old daughter.

WAYSHAK

This month's Scorched Earth illustrator has no skin and severe scoliosis. Hey, that's like the Congo monkey! You can check out other revealing photos of him at his site, ScrapbookManifesto.com.

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Letters

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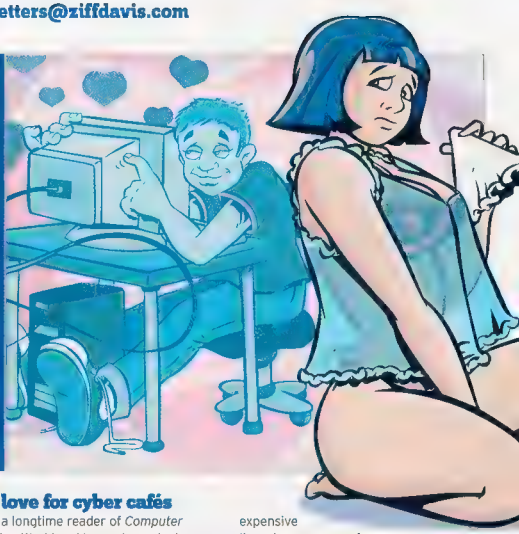
LETTER OF THE MONTH

We'll give you some loving, baby

Liz Moore



Jeff Green and David Hasselhoff

Major lapse in '80s trivia. Eternally moody Jan Michael Vincent was in *Airwolf*, not *Knight Rider* [Letters, September 2003]. That was pseudo-macho David "I wanna be a rock star" Hasselhoff. And you call yourselves computer geeks.

Mike G.

Whoops! But now that you mention it, maybe Jeff looks more like David Hasselhoff anyway.

No love for cyber cafés

I am a longtime reader of *Computer Gaming World* and have always truly believed your slogan "The Best PC Gaming Magazine." In your September 2003 issue I was excited to see that you had done an article on cyber cafés [Read Me]. As a cyber café owner myself, I was looking forward to reading a well-written article from a gamer's perspective that didn't take every opportunity to bash this struggling industry in the United States. THEN I read the article.

The writer took every opportunity to trash and put down cyber cafés. Apparently inspecting two nonviolent cyber cafés was not enough, the author instead decided to pull up every violent encounter in a cyber café on the planet he could find.

Then the writer proceeded to note every high-school dropout and delinquent in each café, like these are the only people who come to cafés. Personally I would have at least liked to know how the unemployed could even afford to play

Most cyber cafés are doing everything they can to get by. There is no big money in it for us usually, but we want to bring something back to the community that the easy availability of personal PCs and broadband Internet has left behind: the ability to actually socialize with people person to person.

With low incomes, psychotically expensive licensing programs from many publishers, and a press that is always ready to beat up computer games every time someone performs a violent act, the last thing we need is gaming mags shooting us down. So how about giving us a break?

Dragon

George Jones replies: The point of the article was neither to bash nor glorify the cyber café, merely to describe these 21st-century arcades and their clientele. Not surprisingly, these clubs—like bars, gyms, parks, and arcades—mirror the socio-economic circumstances of the neighborhoods they're situated in.

Are they cheating, or do you just suck?

In response to Richard Bombardier's misguided rant about *Day of Defeat* being overrun with cheaters [Letters, September 2003], I must say this: You are dumb. *Day of Defeat*, as I'm sure you and everyone else who's played the game is aware, is an ultra-realistic FPS game. One shot kills, no questions asked. I too have played the game from the initial releases when there were only a handful of good servers. With all this experience under my belt, I can't say I've met a cheater yet. I've run across people with lucky streaks, and I myself have had lucky streaks leading to scores of 15-0, but was I cheating? I think not. Just because the quality of play is increasing and you get reamed

"In response to his misguided rant, I must say this: You are dumb."

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MAIL BITES

The single thing that Wil has been correct about is that Dana and redheads are the bomb diggity.
simenu

If you are one of those people who pirate games off the Internet, you are an evil sonuvabitch (even if you are a girl), and should be put to death. Either that or forced to watch every Joe Don Baker film ever made.
-ex

I believe there is no better father-child activity than working together to free the virtual world of an evil computer oppressor.
SKowalke

You guys are possibly the best magizine ever. Wil is stupid, though.
Spanky

doesn't mean that the experienced players are cheating.

Chaddius Maximus

Jeff Green and Gomer Pyle

First *Bookworm Deluxe*, now *SpongeBob SquarePants*—you're starting to scare me, Green [Editorial, September 2003].

By the way, here on the right coast, my buds and I say Jeff Green is Jim Nabor's clone. Not the Andy Griffith one, the Gomer Pyle USMC one.

Well, GOLLY!

Computer Dave from NJ

CGW: the scrumtrelescent magazine

I'll be honest. When I first started receiving your mag, I hated it. The articles were long and boring, with a large lack of writing skills, the jokes were clumsy and mildly funny, and your mailbox was packed with hate mail.

But, as time progressed, *CGW* has improved. It's finally my favorite computer mag, and when I look into my mailbox to see that *CGW* has arrived, I'm filled with a great sense of joy. It's as if God had looked me in the face and told me, "You are my most perfect creation." Articles in your mag now are written with genius (there is rarely that half-assed stuff from a while back).

When I see the Tom-versus-Bruce section, the features, and the awesomely in-depth preview section, what do I think? There is no English word to describe how I feel about it, so I'm forced to come up with one right now. My word describing your articles is, as Will Ferrel once said, "scrumtrelescent." Yes, the Tom-versus-Bruce section in particular is...scrumtrelescent.

Also, after seeing your brilliant (dare I say "life changing"?) preview of the new *Max Payne*, I must say "Noooo!" He does look older, and wiser, but that's not what I want! I will miss the young, cocky Max, whose slapstick humor made me chuckle, and seldom laugh!

Dylan Goodall

Hot hot hot!

When I first subscribed to *CGW*, I was always pleasantly surprised by the artistic covers. It was always the latest issue of CGW that sat at the top of my magazine pile, simply because it looked nice, but your August issue made me wonder, "What the hell happened?" Where there used to be screenshots and pictures of dragons there is now an exclamation of "Hot Hot Hot." The only "art" is a shot of Gordon Freeman's beautiful mug and a picture of a PC. All things considered, issue 229 was quite good, but I don't see how a "hot" review is so much better than a normal one. Well, anyway, thanks for the great mag.

Aaron Jones

Yeah, now that you mention it, "Hot Hot Hot" was kind of retarded. What can we say? We were nostalgic for Buster Poindexter that issue.

Define this

The inclusion of the Gaming Glossary is a nice addition to *CGW* [Sept 2003], but am I the only reader who wasn't exactly slapping his forehead with sudden and complete comprehension upon learning that, for example, AF is short for "anisotropic filtering?" Providing a short explanation along with the definition of each acronym might make the glossary a more useful tool for those of us without advanced degrees in computer science. Unless of course anisotropic filtering is a widely used and much bandied about term which everyone but me is familiar with, in which case: Screw you.

CjT

C'mon, CjT! Even backwoods inbred Appalachians know what anistropic filtering is! What's with kids today? For those who don't know: Anistropic filtering is a technique used by graphic cards and 3D programs to help clean up and sharpen angled polygon textures. Duh.

SNAFU. You defined "RFTM" in your new glossary of TLAs. You choads are so FUBAR. Next time RTFM! ROFL.

Marlin Eller

Will somebody please, PLEASE tell me the definition of the mysterious term: "ur suck?" It's hard to be properly indignant when you don't understand the insult. Also, I desperately want to appear to be a cool, hip Internet kinda guy by using trendy little acronyms and "clever" misspellings. Not to mention that I'm way too busy and important a person to use full, proper English (and punctuation) when I'm on the Net. Thank you so much! I can't wait to tell some guy I've never met "ur suck" and actually know what I'm saying!

Christopher Wittig

Wha' happened?

Extra points for the quote from *A Mighty Wind* in the caption on page 37 of the August 2003 issue, even if it left readers wondering, "Hey, wha' happened?"

As for the whole "porn" debate, keep up the boob work. Thanks for the monthly highlight that is your magazine,

Jeremy

Robert writes gooder than you

Dear Mr. Coffey,

Thank you for you're recent *CGW* column [September 2003]. Your a journalist that knows how to write good. You never use repetitive redundances or end sentences with a preposition in. You're grammar and speling is very good to. Some day I want to be as good of a writer as you.

I hope this little e-letter makes its way upsteam into the safe harbor of your in-box, past spam filters, and around *CGW*-reader filters. I've been reading your work long before you joined the *CGW* staff. Keep up the fascinating, colorful and acerbic commentary.

Mike Steinlauf

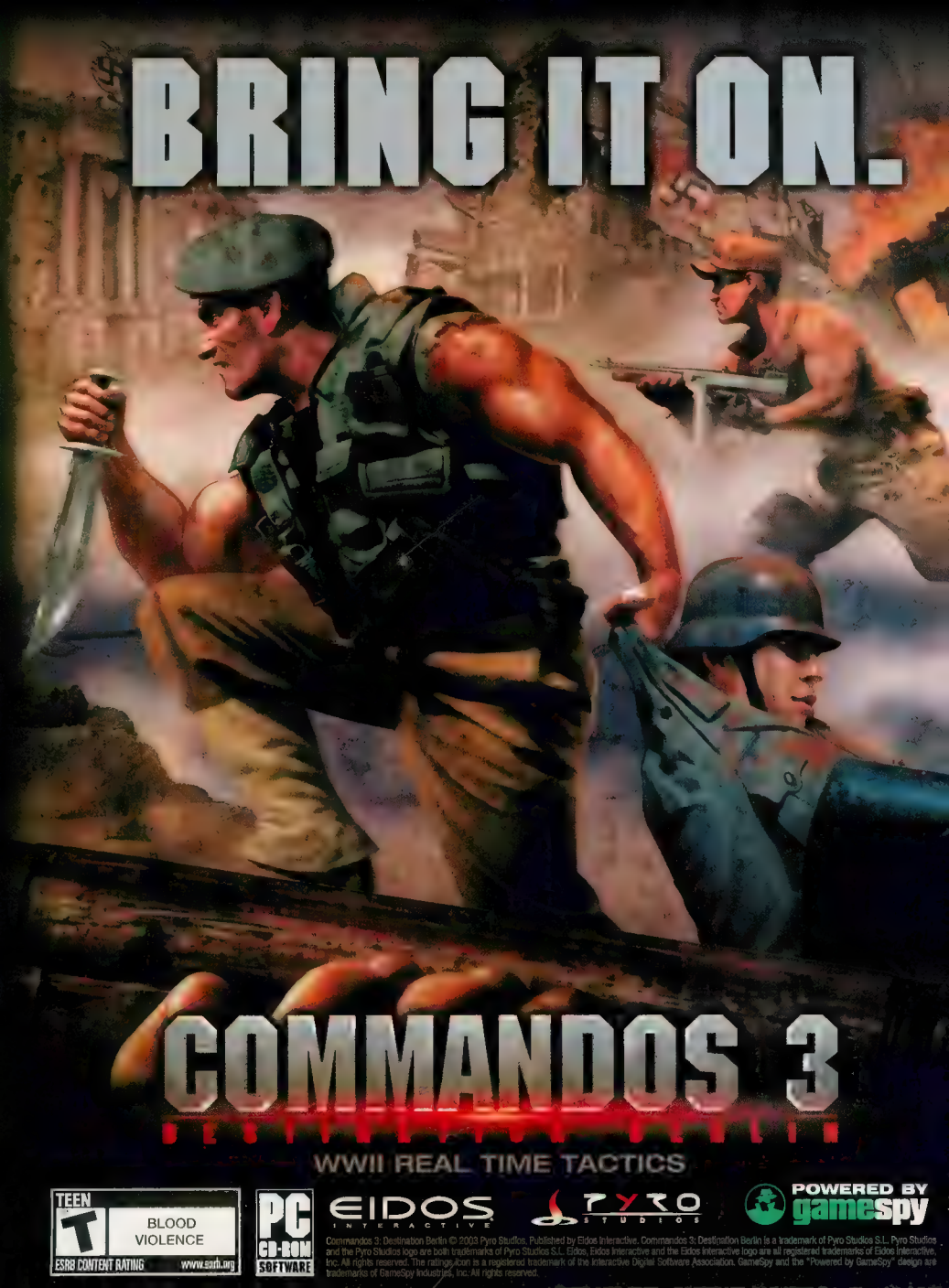
Forget what everybody else says about you, Robert, I think that you are 100 percent correct. Sure you might throw a big word in here or there, but they are usually words you learn in high school, and if you didn't, you should go hunt down your English teachers and smack them for robbing you of an education. Keep up the good work, Robert.

HF[S]Devil

Corrections: The name for the new *Raven Shield* expansion is *Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword*, and the name for the new *Empires* expansion is *Empires: Dawn of the Modern World*.

"You should go hunt down your English teachers and smack them."

ONE ELITE UNIT...
INSURMOUNTABLE ODDS...



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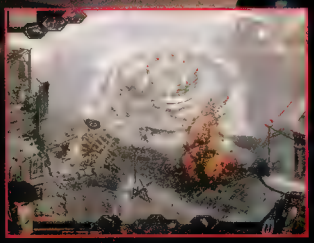
"COMMANDOS 3 JUST BLOWS ITS PREDECESSOR AWAY."

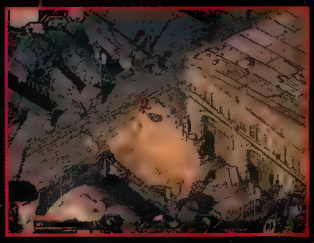
GAMESPOT

COMING SOON



Prepare for a variety of strategies as bombing raids alter the environment, requiring you to change your tactics on the fly.

Navigate detailed interior and exterior environments using vehicles, stealth, [illegible] and sabotage to disrupt enemy advances.



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1943, German Panzer tank divisions guard the gates of Europe, controlling the ports of North Africa and the advance of an Allied army with bloody force. Of all the weapons in its arsenal the most feared was its reputation. Face your fears, free North Africa and fight for history to repeat itself.

February 14, 1943 Tunisia, Kasserine Pass

The 5th Panzer division punishes the US 2nd Corps in their initial assault, inflicting grievous losses.

May 7, 1943 Allies Take Tunisia

February 22, 1943 Tunisia, Kasserine Pass

Take back the Pass. Fight through German lines, encountering allied and axis tanks and troops. Steal a German tank and inflict continuous casualties on unsuspecting Nazis.

Violence

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July 13, 1943 Sicily, Italy

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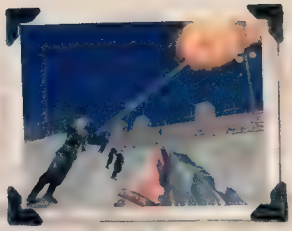

January 22, 1944 Anzio Maneuver

Destroy Germany's K5 rail guns, making the landing at Anzio safe for the Allied 3rd.

October 6, 1943 Bizerte Canal

Cross the Canal under heavy fire and hit the ground gunning. Engage the enemy in street combat to take command of the German port city.

May 17, 1944 Exiting Monte Cassino

German Panzer divisions surround you. They can't get away this time. Smash, cripple and exploit the heavy armor with the new British PIAT Anti Tank Weapon.

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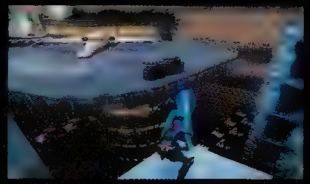

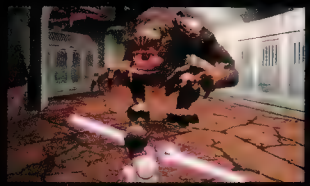

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The hottest shots of the best new games Edited by Dennis Gladstone

ROME: TOTAL WAR

Legend has it that Nero fiddled while Rome burned. What the hell was Activision doing when my computer choked up from downloading this massive 220MB file? Speaking of massive, get a load of the scale of this picture and what is happening all over the screen! Cities are smoldering, various armies are gathering, and in the distance, you can even see some war elephants marching. *Total War* really impressed us at this past E3, so you can expect some serious preview coverage down the road.

ROBIN HOOD: DEFENDER OF THE CROWN

Color us nostalgic. We ran a preview of the new *Defender of the Crown* back in the May issue, and we got a couple misty e-mails from old-school gamers—people who remember playing the original on an Amiga (fer chrissakes!). Well, the game is still on track for a PC release sometime this fall, and the folks at Cinemaware gave us a nice shot of a joust—one of several minigames within *DOTC*.

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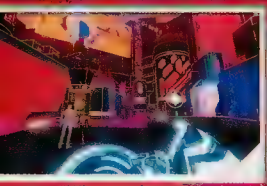

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Maintaining order means eliminating rogue programs, such as humans.

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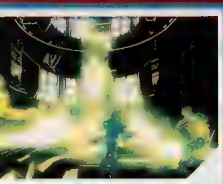

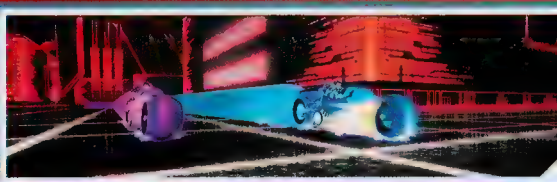

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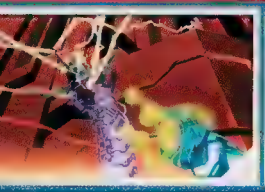

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CGW INTERVIEW

Bye-Bye, Blizzard

Bill Roper, one of gaming's few rock stars, has left Blizzard Entertainment after nine years. What happens now? By George Jones

INSIDE

TERMINATOR 3
Ever want to be Ahnold? Here's your chance.
Page 44

NHL HOCKEY
A pucking good time.
Page 46

NOLF2 ADD-ON
Contract J.A.C.K. looks to do some harm.
Page 50

AOM UNPLUGGED
Oh no, not the meteor card!
Page 52

Bill Roper has a 25-minute drive between his Burlingame home and downtown San Francisco. This provides the perfect opportunity for the legendary game designer to reflect upon nine years of hard work well done at Blizzard Entertainment. "I will definitely be bummed," he laments, "to not be able to come into the office and throw down a *zug-zug*."

Few game designers' identities are as enmeshed with a single company as 38-year-old Roper's. Id has John Carmack, Maxis has Will Wright, Shigeru Miyamoto pretty much is Nintendo, and Bill Roper is—sorry, was—the face of Blizzard. "I think many people will remember me as the main conduit of information between Blizzard and the gaming community," he reminisces. "Of that I am proud."

Still, Roper finds the whole experience bittersweet. "I'm leaving behind a great company, a lot of close friends, and a great franchise that I helped build." You can tell he's getting a little nostalgic for a second. "I'll definitely miss that...and the people." His voice trails off a little. "But I've got all new attachments now."

Roper wanted to be more involved in the sale of Vivendi's games division, which owns Blizzard.

"I just want to be remembered as a person who did everything he could to make the best games possible."

This break from Blizzard feels like the right thing, a breath of fresh air. "It's like starting a new relationship," he confesses. "I am soooo excited." One thought lingers in the air, though: It didn't have to go down this way.

A final farewell

Why did Roper leave Blizzard? He asserts that it wasn't so much a power clash as an outright rejection. In late June, Vivendi Universal denied his request for greater involvement in the expected sale of Vivendi's gaming unit. "I wanted to have more insight and more input in the process," Roper explains. "Blizzard is a great company, and I just wanted to hear what was going on." On the Friday before the abrupt good-bye, upper management told him exactly what was going on: nothing. His input was not desired and his request for more information was denied.

Roper and fellow Blizzard North cofounders Erich Schaefer, Max Schaefer, and David Brevik tendered their resignations. Three days later it was official: Blizzard Entertainment president and cofounder Mike Morhaime, who 10 years earlier had wondered whether a newly hired Roper would have enough work to do, suddenly found himself bidding a fond farewell to one of the company's most valuable and popular employees. "I speak for everyone in our company," he stated, "when I say how grateful we are to have had the opportunity to work closely with this group of individuals....We wish them nothing but the best and are confident that they will be successful in their future endeavors." That new endeavor is an as yet-unnamed new studio.

The news hit the gaming industry and even the mainstream press like a tidal wave. "Vivendi's Game Gem Gets Tarnished," CNN Money trumpeted. "Four Blizzard Kids Wave Bye-Bye," IGN.com reported.

CNN Money's Chris Morris quickly reported on analyst speculation that the resignation would result in a lower sale price for Vivendi Universal's games division. Roper, humbled by the possibility, was more hopeful that the situation might underline the importance of the development community.

"The success of games isn't just the name on the box or the franchise," Roper explained in the CNN article. "It's the people who make the games. Just like you want Stephen King or J.K. Rowling to be writing your book, you want the best possible people making a game for you." He concluded, "People are important." And these four people that left played a significant part.

Humble beginnings

When Roper arrived at Blizzard in 1994, the company was just beginning work on *WarCraft*. A closet actor ("All my best work is done in the closet") and former *Dungeons & Dragons* junkie, Roper leapt at the opportunity to contribute to the game's story and made the most of it.

"They had this screenshot of a castle [for the original *WarCraft* game], and they wanted to have voiceovers explaining why the Orcs and the Humans were at war," Roper reminisces. "So I sat in this office that was literally a closet and started to write." Laughing out loud at the low-budget beginning to one of gaming's most glorious franchises, the game designer's face tightens into a snarl, his voice dropping into a low rumble as he delivers the first line of dialogue from the very first *WarCraft*. "In the age of Chaos, two factions battled for dominance..."

Nine years later, Roper finds himself pleased at the thought of all the trips, all the games, all the memories. At the end, however, it always comes back to human beings. More than anything, he admits, "My most cherished memories are of the people." The sleepless nights, the mental jam sessions, and cracking guys up with a well-timed Orc quote.

"I just want to be remembered as a

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK CUNTAN

"My most cherished memories are of the people," says Roper. But he'll miss the Orcs, too.

person who did everything he could to make the best games possible." Reflecting further, Roper reveals his populist tendencies. "I also want to be remembered as someone who tried to include and support everyone in that process, regardless of their position in the company."

Roper admits that he and the new cofounders of his nascent game company look back and can't believe how far they've come. Ten years ago, this guy was concerned that a career at Blizzard would pay less than desktop publishing. He isn't about to forget his heritage, though. He got his copy of *WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne* and can't wait to play it. It's this zeal for gaming that will continue to push him, and hopefully his new company, to further greatness.

Meanwhile, Roper leaves a legacy of fun, accessibility, and success—along with some massive shoes to fill—in his wake at Blizzard, leaving gamers with one final unspoken question. Who's going to throw down the *zug-zugs* now?

RECON

Rise of the Machines

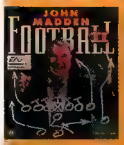
T3 will finally let you be Arnold

He said he'd be back this summer, and he was. Big Arnie's iconic killing machine slayed them at the movies, and this holiday season you can do the same when *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* puts you in Arnie's oversized butt-kicking boots.

As in *The Matrix* game (don't hold it against them), the developers were camped on the set capturing Arnie's voice and likeness for the game, which will also feature the ubiquitous bonus content from the movie. Surprisingly, classic FPS action will be interspersed with fighting game sequences as the Terminator goes one-on-one with Kristanna Loken's delectable but deadly T-X. You can indulge in some guilt-free human slaughtering in the early part of the single-player campaign, before you're eventually reprogrammed by Tech Com to protect John Conner. Arnie's arsenal includes both modern-day and futuristic weaponry, such as the M4A1, Desert Eagle, phased plasma rifles, and cannons.

A ton of vehicles will also be at the player's disposal in both single-player and multiplayer modes: the humans can use trucks and cars with mounted guns, plasma rifles, and rockets. Multiplayer Terminators can play as a Fighter Killer hovercraft or Hunter Killer tank.

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY



THE GOOD MADDEN ENTERS HALL OF FAME

Madden NFL Football has been officially inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. It's the first videogame to be so honored, and unless Gordon Freeman decides to become a place-kicker in *Half-Life 2*, it's probably going to remain the only game for a good long time. The *Madden NFL Football* franchise has sold more than 30 million copies in its 14-year history. You'd think Madden could afford to get his eyebrows trimmed.

THE BAD KOTOR PC

This is more of a "glass half-empty" bad: *Knights of the Old Republic* has been getting absolutely stellar reviews on the Xbox. It had the reviewers breaking out their thesauri to find adjectives good enough to describe it—our colleagues at *EGM* and *GMR* are giving it their highest ratings. The bad part? PC players have to wait until November, because Microsoft paid LucasArts extra to delay it on the PC. Thanks a ton, guys. Really.

THE UGLY THE BLAME GAME

Only a week after the release of the *Tomb Raider* movie sequel, Paramount blamed its lousy box-office sales on the new videogame, *The Angel of Darkness*. A Reuters story quoted Paramount executive Wayne Lewellen as saying, "The only thing we can attribute [weak sales] to is that gamers were not happy with the latest version of the *Tomb Raider* videogame, which is our core audience." Sure, Wayne, it has nothing to do with the fact that the movie was a boring waste of money.

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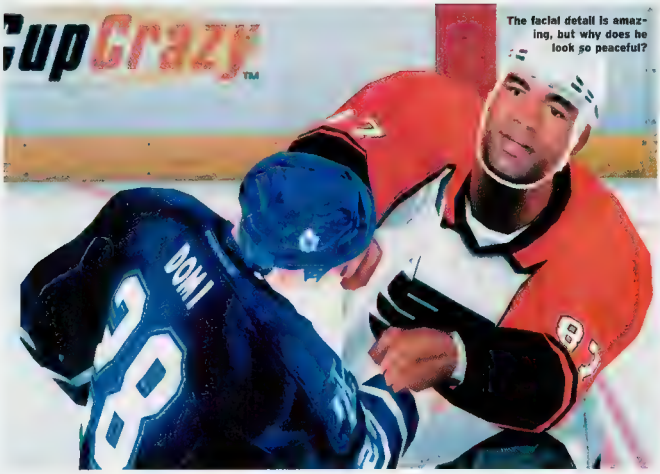

The facial detail is amazing, but why does he look so peaceful?

PREVIEW

Stick Happy

NHL 2004 will let you play, coach, and manage a hockey dynasty **By Darren Gladstone**

EA Sports' venerable NHL franchise wasn't skating on thin ice, but it was in dire need of an overhaul. After seeing a late beta version of *NHL 2004*, though, it appears EA's signature hockey game is set to score a hat trick.

While the graphics look better (big surprise) and EA has decided to ditch the all-too-arcade-y card trading system for perks (good call, ref!), the big news here is the dynasty mode, which we took a close look at during a recent trip to EA. For those that want to get into the simulation end of the sport and deal with all the back-room decisions, you can take up the role of both general manager and coach. You'll not only be on the ice, but on the bench, in training at your facilities, and at the head office.

Creating a dynasty is a huge endeavor. You've got 20 years worth of seasons to build your sports franchise both financially and as a team. You get experience points for properly managing the staff, getting training equipment, providing travel for the team, hiring legal staff, and so on. The happier the team is, the better they perform. The better they perform, the higher the attendance at the games. More attendance means more money and experience. You get the idea: Every part of the game—on and off the ice—becomes important. It ships shortly after this issue hits stands, so expect to see a full review soon.

RAARRRR!

Ensemble Studios' Bruce Shelley does his impersonation of a titan during a demo of *Age of Mythology: The Titans*. For more on the game, see page 58.

PHOTOGRAPH BY KEN BROWN

WEAPONS DEPARTMENT
TOP SECRET
WE COULD SHOW YOU THESE SECRET WEAPONS, BUT THEN WE WOULD HAVE TO KILL YOU.

BATTLEFIELD 1942
SECRET WEAPONS OF WWII

- NEW OBJECTIVE BASED GET-OUT-THERE-AND-KICK-SOME [redacted] MODE.
- NEW SOLDIER-CLASS IDENTIFIED: BRITISH COMMANDO. GERMAN ELITE.
- 7 NEW WEAPONS. 3 FOUND: THROWABLE ONE-SHOT KILL KNIFE. SHOTGUN. GRENADE LAUNCHER
- 8 NEW BATTLEFIELDS. EAGLE'S NEST COORDINATES TO FOLLOW.
- 16 NEW [redacted]. HELLRAISING VEHICLES.

ATTENTION
TS = Top Secret
FF = Friendly Fire
SCD = Spawn Campers Die
CS = Crippled Soldier
NCH = Not Coming Home

WEAPONS DEPARTMENT
OFFICIAL BUSINESS

THE WHITE HOUSE
OFFICIAL BUSINESS

CLASSIFIED

Wasserfall rocket developed and functional [redacted] launched, flown, guided [redacted] first person. The first time you'll see it will be your last.

GERMAN PROTOTYPE ROCKET PACK
[redacted] FLY AND DESTROY [redacted]
[redacted] NEVER BRING A TANK TO A ROCKET PACK FIGHT.

BETTER KNOWN TO THE TEAM AS THE FLYING WING. NOW YOU SEE ME, NOW YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE THE REST OF YOUR TEAM IS.

*Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons requires Battlefield 1942 or Battlefield 1942 Deluxe Edition to play

RATING PENDING
RP
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Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for Rating Information

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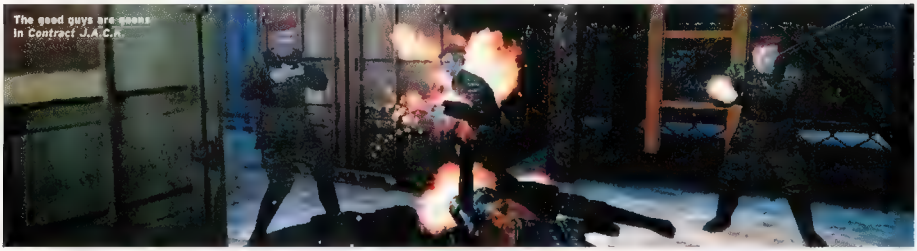
WEAPONS DEPARTMENT
OFFICIAL BUSINESS
1942
C-47 Skytrain will serve as a mobile spawn point equipped with door gunner [redacted] drop in like the unexpected angel of death.
MOTORCYCLE W/ MACHINE-GUN MOUNTED SIDECAR. LOOK STYLISH WHILE CUTTING DOWN THE INFANTRY AT THEIR KNEES.
Strumtiger. Powerful naval gun mounted on tank. Design ideal for louder explosion [redacted] more casualties.
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C.
DOWNLOAD:
SECRET WEAPONS DEMO
ADDRESS:
BATTLEFIELD1942.EA.COM
Now YOU DIE!
No.
$ 5.00
SO SECRET, YOU DON'T KNOW THEY EXIST UNTIL YOU'RE DEAD.
ISSUED TO DIG IN.
ISSUED BY
OCT 3 1942
NOT TRANSFERABLE
VOID IF DETACHED
EA GAMES
CHALLENGE EVERYTHING


The good guys are goons in *Contract J.A.C.K.*

RECON

Contract J.A.C.K.

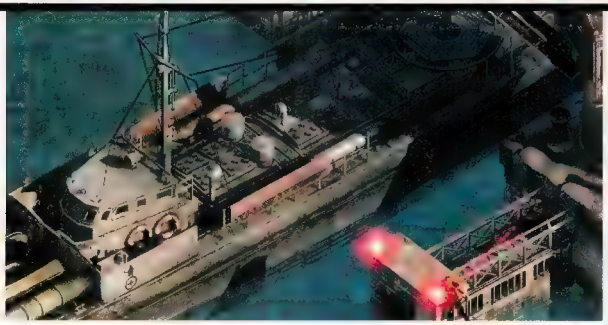
NOLF2 add-on lets you play a henchman in H.A.R.M.'s way By Di Luo

Vivendi Universal is trying to suckle at the lucrative teat of Cate Archer with an upcoming add-on for *No One Lives Forever 2*. *Contract J.A.C.K.*, scheduled for release this holiday season, puts players in the role of John Jack (Just Another Contract Killer), H.A.R.M.'s top assassin and "problem solver."

Unfortunately, you won't be able to fight against Cate in a showdown of good and evil. Instead, you've been sent to deal with Danger Danger, an upstart Italian criminal organization led by a psychopath known as Il Pazzo. Some of the characters of H.A.R.M. found in the previous games will obviously have bigger roles in the expansion, but Cate will simply make a cameo appearance.

Developer Monolith says the expansion will feel much more like the original *NOLF* than the sequel. Levels will be full of gunplay and action instead of gadgets and stealth. Along with the new levels and weapons, *Contract J.A.C.K.* will also feature multiplayer modes such as Deathmatch, Team Deathmach, Demolition, and Doomsday.

Another bonus will be a set of powerful development tools to encourage the modding community to tinker with the game. The single-player gameplay will probably only be around five hours long for the experienced gamer, but Monolith hopes multiplayer options and modding tools will keep gamers busy much longer.



RECON

Commando and Conquer

Scouting the multiplayer modes in Commandos 3 By Darren Gladstone

We hinted in our June preview that *Commandos 3* would boast the series' first multiplayer, and now we've had a chance to see the different modes firsthand.

Commandos-Versus-Commandos warfare pits you against the Nazis and another group of commandos. The Commandos & Allies option allots points so that you can purchase commando squad members and specialists. Or you can play Allies-Versus-Allies, which lets you pick specialists (but not the commandos upon which the game is based).

Once you've picked a multiplayer mode, you can play either Deathmatch or Capture-the-Flag. You can have up to 12 players controlling two bands of commandos (each player controls one commando) or split it up however you want with a maximum of four different teams. *Commandos 3* should have already infiltrated stores near you by the time you read this.

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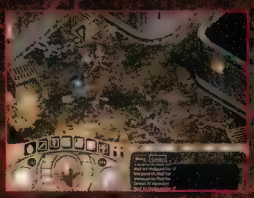
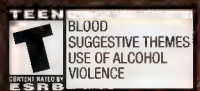


• Master over 80 spells and thousands of weapons.

• Battle individually or in teams.

lionheart.blackisle.com



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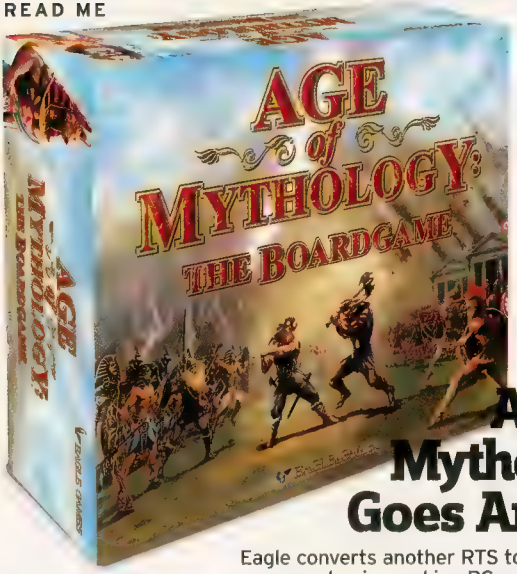


UNPLUGGED

Age of Mythology Goes Analog

Eagle converts another RTS to tabletop and begins making PC games By Di Luo

Since the last days of disco, computers have acted as virtual opponents for wargamers who couldn't find live opponents for their dreams of world conquest. Eventually boardgames faded, and computer games became the drug of choice to sate the armchair general's megalomaniac tendencies.

Eagle Games recently turned this phenomenon on its head with the release of *Civilization: The Board Game*. Already acclaimed for their historical board games, Eagle's *Civ* provided a far better multiplayer experience than the abomination that was the computer multiplayer expansion of *Civilization III*. They'll be making another attempt to win over computer gamers this fall with a boardgame version of *Age of Mythology*.

The boardgame is designed for two to four players and will take the elements of the RTS and separate them into various phases of a turn. Much of the gameplay will feature the use of cards that represent resources and god powers. As with Eagle's previous games, *AOM: The Board Game* will feature several hundred miniatures to represent their electronic counterparts.

Eagle Games is also converting some of their boardgames into PC versions. The computer version of *War! Age of Imperialism*, set during the height of Colonialism, features exploration, economic development, and, of course, lots of death and destruction. Written in Java, the game will allow players to find opponents, play online, save their games for a later date, and play against the A.I. Also included will be map areas and house rules not found in the original game. It won't have fancy 3D graphics and animation, but it should keep budding imperialists occupied till someone decides to make *Imperialism III*.

HANDS ON

SimGhost

Ghost Master plants tongue firmly in Sims-cheek By Ryan Scott

What do you get when you mix a *Sims*-style strategy game with horror? Empire Interactive's *Ghost Master*. The game puts you in charge of a team of spectral mischief-makers, each with unique abilities. You then unleash the ghouls on a bunch of unsuspecting mortals in a *Sims*-style house. Each ghost has a selection of powers, ranging from eerie noise-making to all-out electrical appliance possession. There are profiles for each mortal to clue you into the best ways to frighten them. New ghosts can be freed from the environments for later use, and additional powers can be purchased between hauntings. Check out *Ghost Master* when it ships this October.

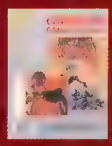
5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN *CGW*

Five Years Ago, October 1998

Our "Fantasy Face/Off" story featured one of our ugliest covers ever: a murky, out-of-focus split image of some guy in maybe-a-helmet and some woman with something that looked like horns. Or a bad hat—it was really hard to tell. Thankfully, the games we previewed were way better than the cover: *Heroes of Might & Magic III*, *Baldur's Gate*, *Myth II*, and *Diablo II*. At least we got that part right.

Ten Years Ago, October 1993

Just as we'd do five years later, 1993 sported a great big fantasy game roundup on the cover. The real changes wrought by 10 years of publication were inside. Case in point: the "Best in Adult CD-ROM" ad on page 125 from a CD-ROM clearinghouse touting *101 Sexual Positions 1* or *2* and—inexplicably wedged in between *Bare Assets* and *Busty Babes 3*—*Bible Library*. A decade later, the Internet has made mail-order porn ads a thing of the past.



Fifteen Years Ago, October 1988

Hmmm...could mere synchronicity explain why we featured *Daily Double Horse Racing*, *Strategic Craps*, and *Championship Poker* in the same issue in which we interviewed gamble-aholic Charlie Hustle about *Pete Rose Baseball*? Who knows. We also interviewed marginal basketball player Michael Jordan for *Larry Bird and Michael Jordan Go One on One*—a title that only sounds like it should be advertised in a special section on page 125 five years in the future.

Jive Turkeys need not apply

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MEP

GOTHAM GAMES

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence

#19

BREAKING OUT

by Scott McCloud

Y'know what would have really improved the *Hulk* game?

A little *USB device* hooked up to your wrist that could measure your *pulse rate.*

Then the more *pissed off* at the game you get --

%@#!

%@#!

-- the stronger Hulk gets!

Frustration is a built-in component in games. We accept the fact that to *be* a game, we have to place restrictions on what we can and can't *do*, where we can and can't *go*, and what we can or can't *affect* with our actions.

If players can *anticipate* these restrictions from the start, frustration is kept to a *minimum.*

Ironically, though, giving players *more freedom* than they're used to can actually *highlight* a lack of freedom elsewhere.

It's a *genuine rush* to be able to *break through* inanimate barriers that would be *immovable objects* in most other games.

You can just feel the *possibility space* of gaming *expand* as you do.

But then why can't we jump off the balcony over *here?*

Why do we need to follow the arrows over *there?*

UNIVERSAL

Designers clearly want to impart a strong sense of *freedom* to players if they can.

New features are added periodically to *enhance* that illusion.

But ultimately, freedom isn't just a feature. *Freedom is a drug,* and one effect of giving us *some* of it is to make us want *more.*

WARGAMES

Lock 'n' Load

The board game that ships with a PC version inside By T. Byrl Baker

At first glance, Mark Walker's *Lock 'n' Load* looks no different than other boardgames that come with hundreds of counters and a hex map. Dig deeper into the box, however, and you'll find a CD containing a VASSAL version of the game that players can use to face off against opponents online.

The fanatics who play *Advanced Squad Leader* are already familiar with the VASSAL game engine, which doesn't enforce rules but otherwise provides a picture-perfect gaming board for online use. This engine is a great fit for *Lock 'n' Load*, which lets players fight it out in a variety of squad-level conflicts from the Vietnam War. The rules are simple by wargame standards but still manage to offer a surprising amount of depth, and VASSAL takes care of the hardest part of playing a boardgame these days—finding an opponent.

The game board and components look good enough that you'd never guess this was the first boardgame published by long-time computer-game publisher Shrapnel Games. See it for yourself with a demo version available at www.shrapnelgames.com.

DECOR

Wallpaper Your PC

Get free access to 1,000 wallpapers for a month By Samuel[illegible]

Can't afford a new PC? Spruce up that Pentium II with a swanky new backdrop from gamewallpapers.com. There are about 1,000 wallpapers that cover more than 300 games on the site. It's been a labor of love for our fine Finnish friend Nico Zweers, who spent three years bathed in the phosphorous glow of Photoshop to put them all together.

Nico's waiving the usual $10 sign-up fee for our readers, so you'll have free access until October 31. Go to gamewallpapers.com and log on using the account "computergamingworld" with password "thanks" and start downloading to your desktop's content.

If that sounds like too much work (impatient slug), you can also find wallpaper available on our demo disc. A big editorial shout-out to gamewallpapers.com for setting this up for our readers. Now get back to work making more, Nico!

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THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS

Half-Life 2 *(Electronic Arts)* Research scientist Gordon Freeman finds himself on an alien-infested Earth being picked to the bone, its resources depleted, its populace dwindling. He is thrust into the unenviable role of rescuing the world from the wrong he unleashed back at Black Mesa.

Homeworld 2 *(Sierra)* Combining elements of real-time strategy and space combat, this game is the next evolutionary step in gameplay and technology. Cinematic-quality graphics, special effects, and an innovative interface create an immersive 3-D space combat experience.

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic *(LucasArts)* It is the Golden Age of the Republic and the Galaxy is reeling from a recent conflict with the Dark Lords, and the ongoing battle between the Jedi and the Sith rages on. Your actions will decide the outcome of this war—and your destiny as a Jedi

Counterstrike: Condition Zero *(Sierra)* This new standalone game extends the award-winning Counter-Strike multiplayer game with new maps, weapons, and more while simultaneously introducing new technologies, an extensive single-player campaign, and cooperative play.

Medal of Honor: Allied Assault Breakthrough Expansion Pack *(Electronic Arts)* You assume the role of US Army Sgt. John Baker as the Allied forces battle from North Africa up the Italian peninsula. Look forward to new campaigns, new weapons, and the new liberation mode for multiplayer.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES

Madden NFL 2004 *(EA Sports)* The most complete, authentic sports video game ever. In-depth features like free online gameplay, new Quick Match play, League play, tournaments, and more career stats allow you to create championship caliber plays.

Halo: Combat Evolved *(Microsoft)* The PC adaptation of the hit console sci-fi shooter is based on the original concept. The action is set on a mysterious alien ring-world, and your objective is to uncover its horrible secret, and destroy mankind's nemesis—the Covenant.

Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons of WWII Expansion Pack *(Electronic Arts)* From classified, cutting edge weapons to secret forces and clandestine places, this game enhances the Battlefield 1942 experience by bringing the most unique and deadly weapons from the German and Allied laboratories to life.

EverQuest: Evolution *(Sony Online)* All you need to enter the world of Norrath in a single package! The original EverQuest and the first five expansions, The Ruins of Kunark, The Scars of Velious, The Shadows of Luclin, The Planes of Power, and The Legacy of Ykesha, along with maps of the continents.

TRON 2.0 *(Disney Interactive)* An action-packed title inspired by TRON, the movie. The game takes place 20 years after the events of the film. Gamers are digitized into cyberspace and will race on light cycles, battle corruption both inside and outside of the computer world, and explore locations.

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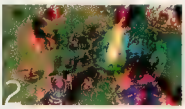
SURVEY

CGW Top 20

Need a good game? Look no further

Vice City: Being bad never felt so good.



Frozen Throne casts another spell on *WarCraft III* players.

Metal Gear Solid 2 sneaks in at No. 3.

RANK	GAME	RATING
1	**Grand Theft Auto: Vice City** (Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
2	**WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne** (Blizzard/Vivendi)	★★★★½
3	**Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance** (Konami)	★★½☆☆
4	**Enter the Matrix** (Atari)	★★½☆☆
5	**Battlefield 1942: The Road to Rome** (Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
6	**Command & Conquer: Generals** (Electronic Arts)	★★★½☆
7	**Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield** (Ubi Soft)	★★★★½
8	**SimCity 4** (Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
9	**Rise of Nations** (Microsoft)	★★★★½
10	**Freelancer** (Microsoft)	★★★★½
11	**The Hulk** (Atari)	★★★★½
12	**The Elder Scrolls III: Bloodmoon** (Bethesda)	★★★★½
13	**Delta Force 3: Black Hawk Down** (NovaLogic)	★★★★½
14	**The Sims: Superstar** (Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
15	**PlanetSide** (Sony Online Entertainment)	★★★★½
16	**Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb** (LucasArts)	★★★★½
17	**Bookworm** (PopCap Software)	★★★★★
18	**Medieval Total War: Viking Expansion** (Activision)	★★★★½
19	**Star Trek: Elite Force II** (Activision)	★★★½☆
20	**Day of Defeat** (Activision)	★★★★½

The Top 20 is obtained from a survey of readers' favorite games from the last six months. To vote, visit our website at www.computergaming.com.

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Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader
(Interplay)

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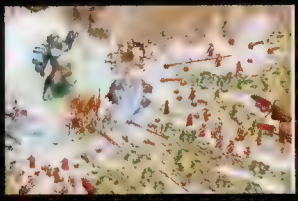
PIPELINE

Ship dates and slip dates for games in the channel

By Di Luo

It's human nature: No matter how many games are stacked on your desk and packing your shelves (and cluttering your closets), they're never as interesting as the ones that haven't shipped yet. Love and the perfect game—why are they so hopelessly elusive?

1 WARLORDS IV It's good to see that despite the heavy reliance on real time for modern strategy games, a big publisher like Ubi Soft is still willing to take a chance with a turn-based game. The newest installment of the storied franchise, *Warlords IV* promises the same addictive gameplay as its predecessors, while updated with modern graphics, a more involved hero system, and more interactive tactical combat. Barring unforeseen obstacles, you should be conquering Etheria anew this holiday season.



2 AGE OF MYTHOLOGY: THE TITANS Bruce Shelley visited us recently with the latest build of *Titans*, the expansion pack for *Age of Mythology*. A good game looks to be getting better, with the addition of the Atlantean race as a separate culture—with its own set of gods—and Titans for everybody. The Titans are basically wonder level buildings that can walk, kill, and destroy nearly anything in their paths. This possible stocking stuffer is scheduled to hit the store shelves this October.

3 HORIZONS: EMPIRE OF ISTARIA This MMORPG recently entered a public beta, and there seems to be quite a bit of buzz building up around it. Even though *Horizons* has a lot lower profile than many of its big-name competitors, people have been suitably impressed by its depth, the variety of races and professions, and the dynamic economy. No firm release date has been set for the game, but this looks like another in a horde of new games that will entice holiday shoppers within the next few months.

Age of Mythology: The Titans	Microsoft	Oct. 2003
Anarchy Online: Shadowlands	Funcom	Q4 2003
Aquanox 2	JoWood	Q3 2003
Armed and Dangerous	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Battlefield Command	Codemasters	Q1 2004
Battlefield Vietnam	Electronic Arts	2004
Beyond Good and Evil	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
Black and White 2	Electronic Arts	Q2 2004
Call of Duty	Activision	Q4 2003
City of Heroes	NCsoft	Q2 2004
Commandos 3	Eidos	Q4 2003
Cold Zero	JoWood	Q3 2003
Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
Crusader Kings	Strategy First	Q4 2003
Defender of the Crown	Cinemaware	Q3 2003
Delta Force: Sabre Team	Novalogic	Q1 2004
Deus Ex 2	Eidos	Q4 2003
Doom III	Activision	Q1 2004
Driver 3	Atari	Q4 2003
Dungeons & Dragons: Temple of Elemental Evil	Atari	Q4 2003
Dungeon Siege II	Microsoft	2004
Empire in Arms	Matrix	Q3 2003
EverQuest II	Sony	Q4 2003
Evil Genius	Vivendi	Q3 2004
Far Cry	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
Freedom: Battle for Liberty Island	Electronic Arts	Q3 2003
Final Fantasy XI	Sony	Q4 2003
Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	Q1 2004
Full Throttle 2: Hell on Wheels	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Galaxy Andromeda	GDV	Q4 2003
Ground Control 2	Vivendi	Q3 2003
Guild Wars	NCsoft	Q4 2004
Half-Life 2	Sierra	Q4 2003
Half-Life Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Valve	Q4 2003
Halo	Microsoft	Q3 2003
Harpoon 4	Ubi Soft	Q3 2003
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Q3 2003
The Hobbit	Vivendi	Q4 2003
Homeworld 2	Sierra	Q3 2003
Horizons	Artifact	Q4 2004
Joan of Arc	Enlight	Q4 2003
Lineage II	NCsoft	Q3 2003
Lords of EverQuest	Sony	Q4 2003
Lords of the Realm III	Sierra	Q4 2003
Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	Q4 2003
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	Q3 2003
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	Sierra	Q3 2003
Magic: The Gathering—Battlegrounds	Atari	Q4 2003
The Matrix Online	Ubi Soft	Q4 2004
Max Payne 2	Rockstar	Q4 2003
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	Electronic Arts	Q1 2004
Men of Valor	Vivendi	2004
Middle Earth Online	Vivendi	Unknown
The Movies	Lionhead	Q2 2004
Mythica	Microsoft	Q2 2004
Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of Underdark	Atari	Q4 2003
No One Lives Forever: Contract J.A.C.K.	Sierra	Q4 2003
Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	2004
Prince of Persia: Sands of Time	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
Railroad Tycoon 3	Gathering	Q3 2003
Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	Q3 2003
Return of the King	Electronic Arts	Q4 2003
Rome: Total War	Activision	Q1 2004
Sam and Max 2	LucasArts	Q3 2004
Savage	iGames	Q3 2003
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	LucasArts	Q3 2003
Shade	Tri Synergy	Q1 2004
SimCity 4: Rush Hour	Electronic Arts	Q3 2003
Splinter Cell 2	Ubi Soft	Q2 2004
Star Wars Jedi Knights: Jedi Academy	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	Q4 2003
Stalker: Oblivion Lost	GSC	Q2 2004
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	Unknown
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	Unknown
Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines	Atari	Q4 2003
Thief III	Eidos	Q1 2003
Total Annihilation 2	Atari	Q4 2003
Tribes: Vengeance	Sierra	Q4 2004
Trinity	Activision	Q2 2004
The Two Towers	Vivendi	Q3 2003
Ultima X	Electronic Arts	Q4 2003
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Q4 2003
Vampire: The Masquerade-Bloodlines	Activision	2004
War in the Pacific	Matrix	Q3 2003
War of the Rings	Vivendi	Q3 2004
Warlords IV	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003
World of WarCraft	Blizzard	Q2 2004
World War II	Codemasters	Q1 2004
XIII	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003

NEW UPDATE

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"RPG HEAVEN...

(Greyhawk) is at the top of my can't-wait-to-play list"
- PC Gamer

IGN.Com- E3 2003

DAILY GAME.Net
E3 2003

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While it may look cool here, shooting blindly into the fog may not be a good idea.

JOINT OPERATI

The modern-day *Battlefield 1942* **By Raphael Liberatore**

NovaLogic's recent tactical shooter *Black Hawk Down* transformed the sagging *Delta Force* franchise into a polished mainstream shooter—even outselling Ubi Soft's vaunted *Rainbow Six* series in the first few weeks. Building off the myriad technological improvements born from the *Black Hawk Down* engine, NovaLogic has also been secretly working on its *Battlefield 1942* killer, *Joint Operations*. After getting an exclusive sortie at its Calabasas, California, studios, we're looking forward to this slick-looking take on modern warfare.

The big difference between *Battlefield 1942* and *Joint Operations* doesn't lie in subject matter or historical accuracy, but in gameplay.

BATTLEFIELD 2003

Joint Operations is a fast-moving multiplayer experience where as many as 64 players slug it out as either separatist guerrillas or joint-operations forces in Indonesia's lush jungles. That, however, is where the similarities end. The first and most obvious difference: *Joint Operations* relies on modern war tactics and equipment. This game is all about mass troop transportation and deployment. To that end, there's a large pool of distinct vehicles, boats, and aircraft such as the Fast Attack Vehicle, LAV, LCAC hovercraft, Mark V patrol boat, Scarab 4x4, Chinook and Mi-26 helicopters—all utilizing *Joint Operations*' specially created vehicle hierarchy system.

"Bringing user-controlled vehicles into the first-person shooter environment is a natural evolution of the genre," says Wes Eckert, NovaLogic's *Joint Operations* producer. "When you're dealing with large outdoor terrains, I think you want to do more than just run around. You want to interact with the environment in new and exciting ways. Many people have worked on the idea of a virtual battlefield over the years where ground troops can seamlessly interact with air, sea, and land combat vehicles. I think the technology has finally reached a point where we can achieve this type of modern battlefield with all of the detail and complexity needed to bring it to life."

The big difference between *Battlefield 1942* and *Joint Operations* doesn't lie in subject matter or historical accuracy, but rather in gameplay enhancements. NovaLogic has had success in its earlier air and tank combat games with simple user-interface controls for driving or flying vehicles and aircraft. This same simplistic concept is being implemented in *Joint Operations*. Also distinct is a co-op mode that's being added for a more enriching multiplayer experience, along with a unique single-player training tutorial containing eight to 10 story-driven missions. The tutorial basically preps players on driving or flying vehicles, boats, and aircraft for online combat. Where the *Delta Force* series took NovaLogic out of the vehicles and into first person, *Joint Operations* is bringing them back together in a surgical strike.

Personal defense against Indonesian carjackings.

OUT IN THE FIELD

According to Eckert, "Working on games from the point of view of the soldier on the ground forced us to focus on the details that make the world engaging: solid weapon physics, interesting terrain features, and other key environmental aspects. Throughout all of this, our multiplayer system matured. With a game like *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*, we went a fairly realistic route. We looked at the roles and missions of Task Force Ranger in Somalia and built missions around their efforts. While not 100 percent accurate, the basis was in reality: the weapons used, the enemy forces encountered, the team tactics. For *Joint Operations*, we wanted to take the idea of modern battlefield combat and mold it into an exciting game. Certain elements of realism, like the look and feel of the terrain, vehicles, and weapons, are needed to immerse the player in the gaming experience. However, certain liberties need to be taken to balance all of this and make the gameplay fun and exciting. In the end, gameplay always wins out over realism."

Four-by-four kilometer (or larger) maps detailing the various jungles and islands of Indonesia will become *Joint Operations*' main attraction. The engine now offers time-of-day changes (see sidebar on page 66) and tropical jungle settings for premium coverage with

GAME STATS

GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
RELEASE DATE: Q1 2004
PUBLISHER: NOVALOGIC
DEVELOPER: NOVALOGIC

little or no framerate reduction on the computer. The rendering of trees and bushes has been optimized by the addition of immense forests containing massive amounts of trees. The *Black Hawk* engine also renders ground cover in the form of dense lower-level foliage that can be affected by the light and shadows of surrounding environments; when players hit the beach and move inland, they'll be moving through profusely green jungles with abundant undergrowth and overhanging trees for those perfect ambush spots or sniper perches. Dense canopies will also afford ground soldiers a certain measure of concealment and cover from overhead craft while offering better ambush and defensive terrain against vehicles. To counter that, modern troops are armed with Mark 4s as standard arms. The built-in thermal sight will help spot unfriendlies camping nearby.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

As water plays a bigger role in this game, attention has been given to improving its look and feel from both above and below. NovaLogic has controlled the level of murkiness for added gameplay. Enemy swimmers are less visible from the land, but because of murkiness, the water becomes harder to navigate while underwater.

"The *Black Hawk* engine offered us a lot of flexibility in terms of the size of terrain we could use and the level of detail we could achieve," says Eckert. "As we moved forward with *Joint Operations*, we further modified the rendering engine to take advantage of the latest 3D-card technology. I think the other critical factor is the realism of the environment. Whether it's the real-time time-of-day changes or the lush jungle environments, players will appreciate the use of the environment as another player in the game."

Sky rendering has been enhanced with the use of vertex shaders and pixel shaders, which allows NovaLogic to depict realistically colored skies that change with the time of day. Factors such as the position of the sun and the position of the viewer allow clouds and sky to show proper lighting and atmospheric effects. The in-game time of day can be changed, allowing the same mission to be played under different environmental circumstances. The result is dynamic, where a dawn assault on an enemy base has the sun in your eyes. However, as the day progresses and the sun sets, your side gains the advantage as your opponent is blinded by the blazing red sunset.

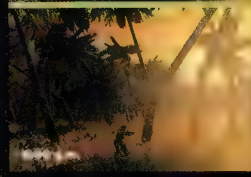
Of course, *Joint Operations*' other big attraction will be players having the chance to utilize some of the latest military hardware and tactics in engaging online battles. Coordinating an amphibious landing with light armor and supporting that with an air-assault component from heliborne forces is something online players should find exciting. The fact that you can fire from the moving vehicles while riding as passengers also gives the game a more realistic feel. The team element really comes alive as players pilot LCACs loaded down with other players, both on foot and in Humvees, for a fierce landing on a hostile beach. As you can tell, we're looking forward to more of this one-two punch of modern combat and old-school shooter fun when it comes out next winter.

GIVING YOU THE TIME OF DAY

Below is a series of time-lapse shots of a single area in the game. Notice how the amount of daylight will affect the way you play.

10:00 a.m.

11:00 a.m.



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TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Violence

PC
CD
ROM

RAPID EYE ENTERTAINMENT

Game experience may change during online play

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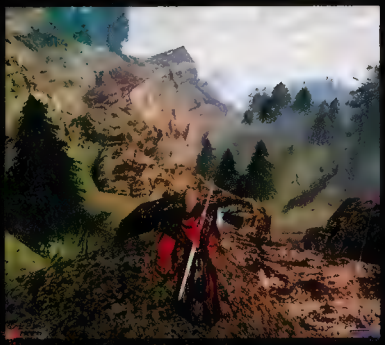
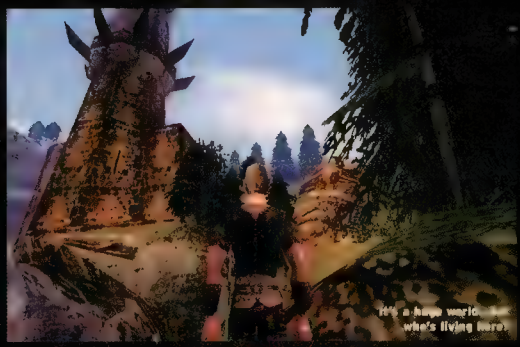
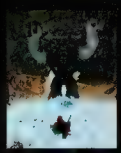






Over time, you become an adventurer fighting off prison toughs and indigenous creatures.

This isn't so much a game as it is a world going on without you—though you're dropped right in the middle of it. Peasants go to work, animals stalk the woods, and you decide whose ass is going to get kicked next. At least, that's the impression I got when producer David Brown blew through the office to show off the sequel to the relatively under-the-radar game *Gothic*. The original was a fresh idea but had some serious execution problems: long load times, funky camera angles, and a tough control scheme. With a loyal following in Europe, though, the game is getting another go here, and we're happy to say that a lot of the issues from the first time around are being licked.

For those unfamiliar with *Gothic*, here's a quick refresher: In this hybrid RPG/action/adventure game, you play a humble, nameless convict at a prison colony. As the new fish, you start off avoiding getting shanked as you mine ore. Over time, you become an adventurer fighting off prison toughs and indigenous creatures. We're assuming you'll be brought up to speed quickly, 'cause the events here, though nonlinear, take place almost immediately after the first episode.

Early on, you pick a path that will affect your in-game experiences. And, unlike the first game, which only tried to show off consequences for your choices, you'll really see the effects in *Gothic II*. Play as a goody-goody paladin, a magic-slinging wizard, or as a ruthless mercenary—the characters you encounter will behave differently depending upon your profession. For example, if you go the way of the mercenary, a group a bandits may welcome you with open arms...as opposed to what will happen when you stumble upon that same camp as a paladin.

After you've picked the path you'll travel, it's time to actually hit the road—and if the producer can be trusted, you'll be plenty busy here. According to Brown, "I've played for about 55 hours, just wandering around, and I'm maybe a third of the way through the game." In the few maps we did see, there are ridiculously expansive outdoors areas with little loading. Vast canyons, snowy mountains, dungeons, towns—they all seem well detailed and stocked with plenty of hidden areas to explore. And while most of the game is played in the third-person perspective, navigation is made easier with the addition of a first-person view (which was sorely missed in the first game). Also, as in the first game, you'll have plenty of people to chat with. More than 400 NPCs with spoken dialogue give you background stories or additional quests, and just generally make the world of *Gothic* a little bit more accessible.

However, there's obviously more to *Gothic II* than just cross-country hikes and chatting with townsfolk. More than 50 types of monsters are lurking in the world, and you've got 100 different types of weapons with which to fend them off. For each class, there are also plenty of submissions to perform and skills to learn. As it stands, *Gothic II* looks on track for its late fall release, and with all the improvements over the original, it could be worth checking out.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ATARI
DEVELOPER: PIRANHA BYTES
GENRE: ACTION RPG
RELEASE DATE: LATE OCTOBER 2003

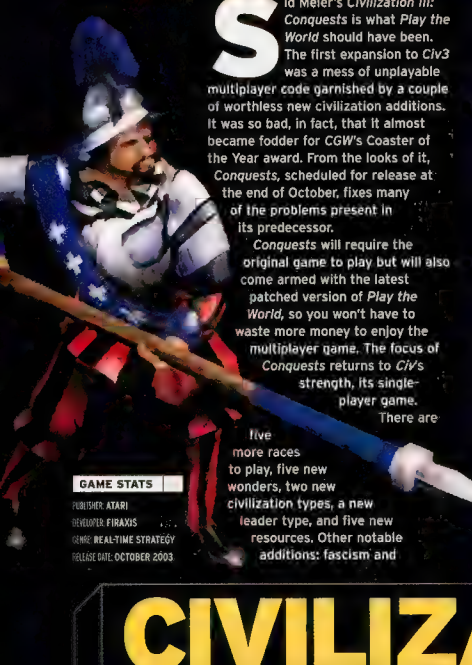
GOTHIC II

A sequel that's back in black

By Darren Gladstone

Halo Invades PC

***Conquests* fixes many of the problems present in its predecessor.**



Sid Meier's *Civilization III: Conquests* is what *Play the World* should have been. The first expansion to *Civ3* was a mess of unplayable multiplayer code garnished by a couple of worthless new civilization additions. It was so bad, in fact, that it almost became fodder for *CGW*'s Coaster of the Year award. From the looks of it, *Conquests*, scheduled for release at the end of October, fixes many of the problems present in its predecessor.

Conquests will require the original game to play but will also come armed with the latest patched version of *Play the World*, so you won't have to waste more money to enjoy the multiplayer game. The focus of *Conquests* returns to *Civ*'s strength, its single-player game. There are five more races to play, five new wonders, two new civilization types, a new leader type, and five new resources. Other notable additions: fascism and feudalism for government types, as well as two new citizens, including the civil servant, which allows you to actually get some production out of your off-continent conquests.

Despite all the additions to the primary game, the centerpiece of the expansion will be the single-player Conquest campaign. The nine Conquest scenarios span the birth of civilization to the World Wars and are heavily modified for those periods. Tech trees, units, wonders, and basic rules of engagement have all been changed to be true to their periods, so you won't ever get machine guns to mow down knights in the Middle Ages scenarios—even on the easiest level.

In crafting these scenarios, Firaxis wanted to create unique playing experiences that could not be generated with a simple scenario editor. The Mesoamerica scenario, for example, demands a cultural victory and rewards players with culture points for sacrificing enemy actives. Others, like the World War II Pacific War scenario, are completely about conquest, with very little in the way of tech or diplomacy. To add to the feel of a world war, *Conquests* incorporates a "locked alliance" system that starts scenarios with sides already predetermined, allowing for life-and-death struggles in which unconditional surrender of one side is the only possible outcome.

Whether these additions are good enough to restore the goodwill lost with *Play the World* remains to be seen. A lot of them should have been in the first expansion, and frankly, many of them seem a bit superficial. The changes often feel like new coats of paint on the same old thing. A tech called industrialization might be renamed craftsmanship, but a factory-like building is still a factory-like building. Despite twists like sacrificing your enemies or a hero unit to act as your ruler, gameplay remains very much the same. Much of the game's dynamics remain the same even in the Conquest scenarios, and one wonders if the changes will make the game fresh enough again to make you want to play for endless hours just to see the victory movies accompanying each scenario. Still, Firaxis promises a much improved scenario editor with *Conquests*, so we can hope that the fan community comes up with something completely new and original to rejuvenate this series.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ATARI
DEVELOPER: FIRAXIS
GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 2003

CIVILIZATION III: CONQUESTS

Sequel to a near coaster **By Di Luo**

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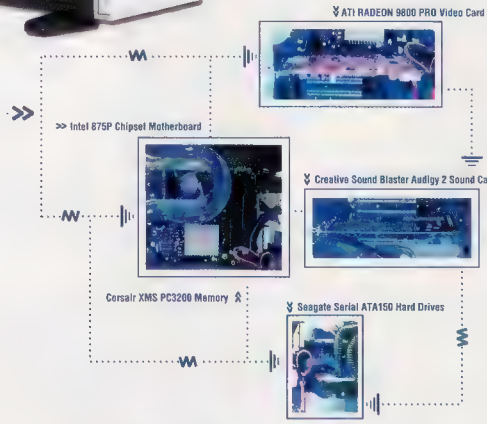
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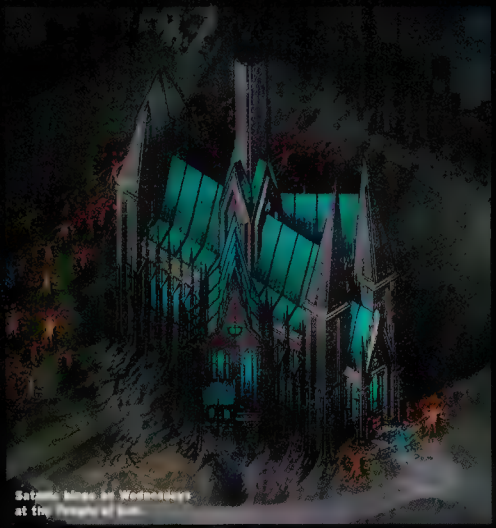


GREYHAWK: TH OF ELEMENTAL

Will we like this game? Let me make a saving throw... By Darren Gladstone

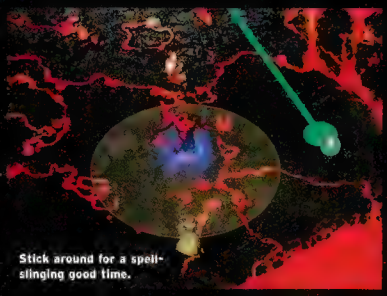
If you've ever heard of Greyhawk's adventures, played the classic module *The Temple of Elemental Evil*, or used the phrase "Now where did I leave my d20," you're going to appreciate what's gone into this faithful translation of the old pen-and-paper game. This videogame retelling features gorgeous good looks, the latest version of the *Dungeons & Dragons* canon, and a deep single-player campaign. The only thing we'll miss: a multiplayer mode.

HEY, GOOD-LOOKING

Troika Games, the RPG heads behind *Fallout* and *Arcanum*, have got their work cut out for them. After all, on one side, you've got the infallible *Baldur's Gate* series, and on the other, you have the handsome pile of orc offal that was the latest *Pool of Radiance*. Here, we see the signature gameplay of *Fallout* series melded with the world of *D&D*. Lead artist Mike McCarthy jokes, "We almost went into too much detail working on this game."

It'll take a little time to notice all the finer points of this game because you first have to get past the amazing detail in the characters and environments. The various areas we've seen almost look as if they were painted on to the screen, save for the brilliant spell and environmental effects that are rendered in 3D—smoke billows, lightning dances, and magic missiles dart around the area. A lot of effort went into conveying sense of scale here. Halflings, elves, and dwarves are noticeably tiny when trying to square off against the likes of a hill giant.

Based on the latest rendition of the *Dungeons & Dragons* rules (version 3.5), *Greyhawk* looks to be a well-organized game that can be as complex or simple as you want it to be. The game is easy to pick up, and for the dice rollers in the crowd, it provides all the hard numbers you can handle. Want to know how the hell you missed that last attack? It'll clearly break down your roll and all the bonuses factored in at the touch of a button. Where most RPGs these days waiver between turn-based and real-time combat with miserable results, *Greyhawk* is strictly turn-based—and it works well. A smartly placed movement bar clearly illustrates how many things you can do and how far you can go before a character's turn is up. This not only makes it easier to pick up the game, but it also helps speed things up. "Instead of making you wait for every rat you're fighting to individually crawl across the screen," McCarthy explains, "enemies move and attack together."



Stick around for a spell-slinging good time.

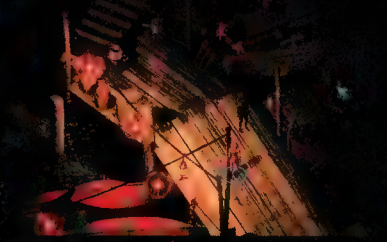
If you still have the original module, you could use the maps for this game.

We'd have to agree—it was over all too quickly for our dwarf fighter. The poor bastard was swarmed by three giants at once and pounded into unconsciousness.

MULTIPARTY MADNESS

While this isn't a multiplayer game, there are several characters who can get your back; you can also find other folks in the world to join you in your quest. Or go ahead and summon a familiar. McCarthy's favorite: Clucky the wonder chicken. If you can keep your familiar alive long enough, it can gain ample experience with you—hence, the level 10 chicken of choking jokes we make at the office.

While the humor is a nice touch, the story itself is taken line for line from the original module. In fact, according to McCarthy, "If you still have the original module, you could open it up and use the maps for this game." Thanks for the money-saving tips, Mike. Of course, it can't be identical to the original. In one part, McCarthy explains, "There's one room filled with 20 bugbears. We asked ourselves, 'Why the hell would 20 of



anything be in a single room?'" The solution: have eight bugbears in the room and the remaining 12 patrolling nearby. There are other nice twists that are reliant on the class of your party—for example, if you're a good alignment party, you start the game with a summons from the king; if you're evil, you're likely to slaughter townsfolk for beer money. Make your own choice and prepare for the adventure yourself when *The Temple of Elemental Evil* is open for services this fall.

E TEMPLE EVIL

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ATARI
DEVELOPER: TROIKA GAMES
GENRE: ROLE-PLAYING GAME
RELEASE DATE: Q3 2003

WAR OF THE RING

More orcs for dorks **By Tom Chick**

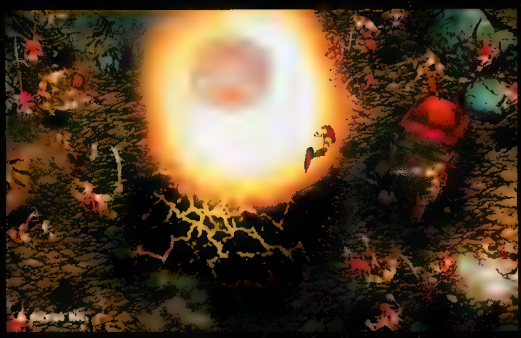
You may be tempted, but don't dismiss Liquid Entertainment's *War of the Ring* as some quick-and-easy *WarCraft* RTS stamped with a *Lord of the Rings* license. Sure, both games have a lot in common: You've got your world full of orcs, elves, and dwarves; you'll have to carefully watch your units and manage their special abilities; the economy and base building are streamlined to emphasize combat; and there's an accessible story-driven campaign. But there's more to war than that.

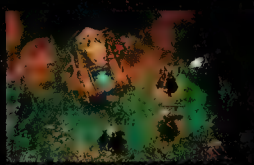
Having cut its teeth on Battle Realms, Liquid built on what is already done. From the hand-drawn maps with animated foliage and wildlife to the painstakingly detailed character models and vivid colorful artwork, *War of the Ring* tries to capture the essence of the books, not the gritty gray aesthetic of Peter Jackson's movies. "We wanted it to have a very painterly look," says artist J.M. Ringuet. "We want you to almost see the brush strokes on every tile."

You'll also find a special resource analogous to Battle Realms' *Yin/Yang*, only this time it's called Fate (for the good side) or Power (for the evil side). You can spend these precious points to upgrade your unit capabilities or improve your unique heroes. But a new dynamic in *War of the Ring* is the addition of god spells, which can be cast at any time if you're willing to spend the Fate or Power. Do you save up for a poisonous sniper attack for your haradrim assassins or blow all your Power summoning a balrog? Will your good opponent improve his elven archers so they can attack while cloaked, or will he spend his Fate to cast a blindness spell that prevents your units from attacking anything that isn't immediately adjacent?

Another new dynamic in the game is the way maps will include points of power. These will give the player who controls them a unique global bonus, not unlike the structures in the *Command & Conquer* series, where controlling a hospital meant your infantry would slowly heal over time. In *War of the Ring*, for instance, there's a special aviary that will let you scout the map with birds and a magical sentinel that increases the armor of all your units. A good player whose units don't include orcs won't be able to use a location like the Orc Mask, which gives a combat bonus to your orcs, but he'll certainly want to keep it out of the hands of his evil opponent. With tricks like these up Liquid's sleeves—and armies of familiar characters such as Frodo, Gandolf, Aragorn, and Gollum—there should be enough to keep this game from being more than some simple *WarCraft* clone.

"We want you to almost see the brush strokes on every tile."





This ancient fountain that heals your units is one of the more typical points of power you can control on a map.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES
DEVELOPER: LIQUID ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY
RELEASE DATE: Q1 2004

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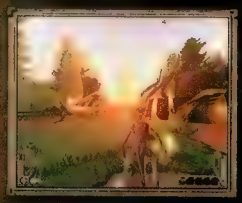

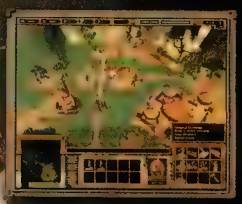

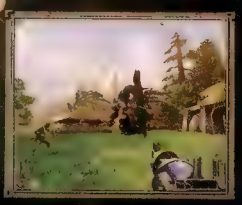

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OUTTA SIGHT

The best games you've never seen

By Scott Steinberg

Score one for irony. Where publishers once saw nothing but problematic small-potatoes games, they now see profit. As a result, we intrepid explorers have scoured the planet, looking for tomorrow's underground hits. From European wastelands to Mother Russia's tortured bosom, here's the latest batch of games that might just catch on.

VOODOO ISLANDS

FROM: SPIRIT
GENRE: ROLE-PLAYING GAME
AVAILABILITY: Q4 2003

SPREAD THE WORD: Well, blow me down! Between this game, *Pirates of the Burning Sea*, and Bethesda Softworks' latest swashbuckling sim, we haven't seen this many pirates since our last LAN party. A robust real-time RPG involving ship-to-ship battles combined with on-foot forays, *Voodoo Islands* lets you play as a murderous cutthroat or dashing corsair. Dozens of side plots and subquests beckon, but beware: Monsters, traps, cannibals, and worse await unsuspecting captains. Options to dig for buried treasure and build your own impregnable fortress already have our timbers shivering.
BEST UNHEARD: Are pirates becoming the new monkeys? Sid Meier is back at the buccaneer business. Flying Lab has a massively multiplayer title based around the subject in the offing. And the genre wasn't all that popular even to begin with. Too many brigands can spoil the broth, or so they say, especially when Spirit—an unknown German developer—casts its lot into an already saturated market. We like what we see so far, but numerous competitors may make it walk the proverbial plank.

THE BLOODY MAGIC

FROM: 1C/SKY FALLEN
GENRE: MAGICKING
AVAILABILITY: 2004

SPREAD THE WORD: Abracadabra... seemingly from nowhere, Russian giant 1C conjures up an RPG that focuses solely on magicians. It's set in a medieval world, and players battle the evil Modo and his henchmen from a third-person perspective, utilizing spells from a dozen different magical schools. Specialization matters most during multiplayer matches, in which wizards can combine mystical rites and weapons to create devastating combo effects. The emphasis is on combat, so take our advice: Think twice before touching another man's wand.
BEST UNHEARD: Simple kill-at-will adventuring, eh? The formula worked well for *Diablo*, but successive years have seen audiences tire of such simple conceits. Let's hope the "smorgasbord of spell effects" approach proves magically marketable. Splitting the team's focus between solo and multiplayer modes could be a mistake as well. From the look of things thus far, all is proceeding as planned, but we might wind up with another *Sanity* on our hands.

KREED

FROM: BURUT CREATIVE TEAM
GENRE: SCI-FI SHOOTER
AVAILABILITY: 2004

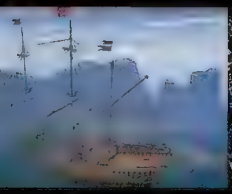
SPREAD THE WORD: Like Richard Roundtree in some of his finest roles, you play as a rough-and-tumble badass who inadvertently tumbles into trouble, courtesy of a black hole. Built atop the X-Tend engine, this sexy sci-fi first-person shooter pushes resolutions up to 1600x1200, letting you appreciate every moment you're locked in frenzied firefight alongside shockingly intelligent computer companions in living color. Blending frenzied action with a fully fleshed-out backstory, it's Russia's answer to *Star Trek: Elite Force II*. Well, let's hope it's a little better than the aforementioned game—but you get the idea.
BEST UNHEARD: Besides the fact that the title's developer sounds like it was named after an All G skit, the company has yet to ship a game outside domestic borders. Since first-person shooters from foreign territories—see *Chaser*, *Sniper*, and half of Activision Value's product line—are a dime a dozen, it doesn't inspire confidence. Burut may still pull an ace out of its sleeve, but we won't put money, or much free time, down on it yet.

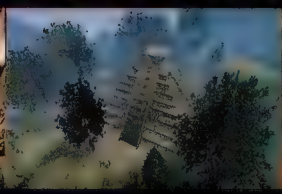
Gothic II

"Watch out Blizzard, Bioware and Black Isle! The competition is about to heat up with the release of this surprisingly remarkable sequel."
–PC Gaming World

"...it is the most captivating game I have played lately."
– Computer Games

See the world of Gothic II in action at www.gothic2.com





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JoWooD Productions

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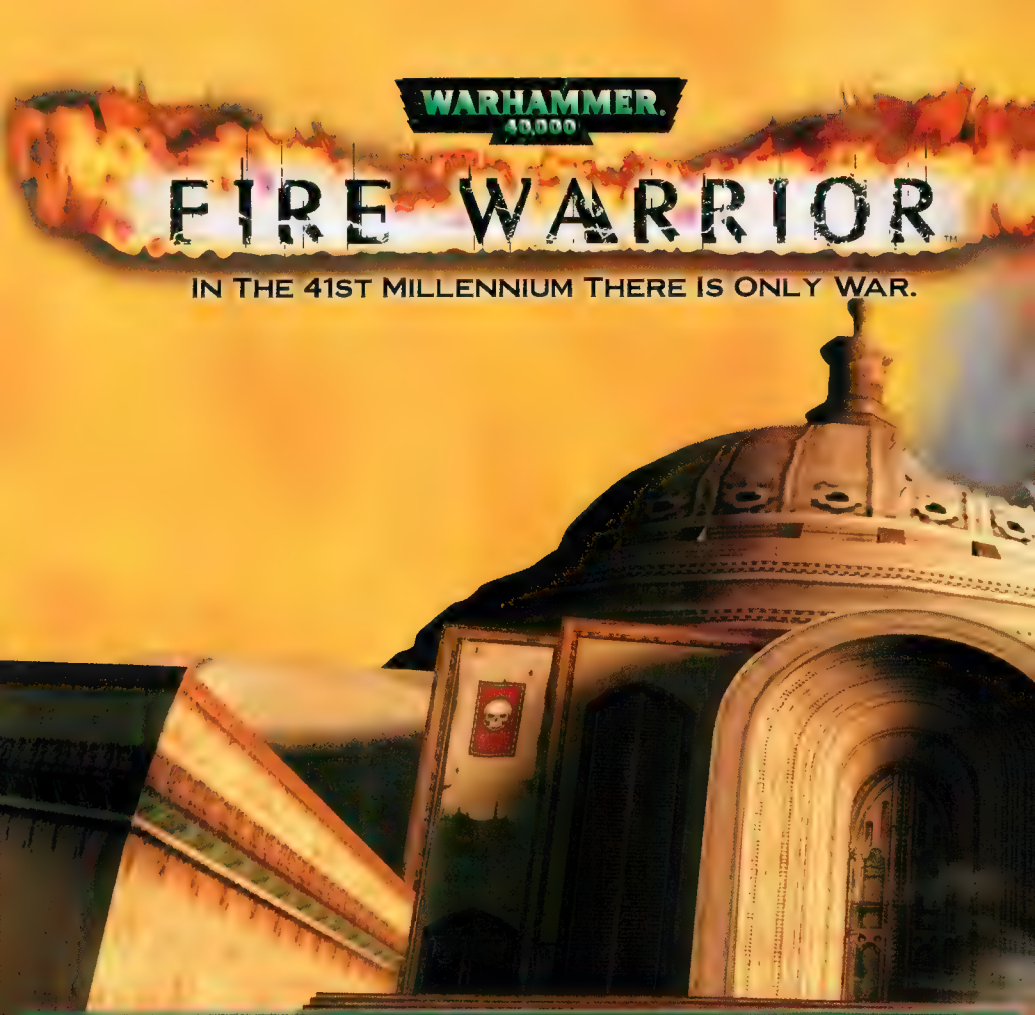

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NAME: IRWIN FINKLE

SCREEN NAME: THE EXTIRWINATOR

PROFESSION: HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

SPECS: HUSBAND. FATHER OF FOUR

WEAPON OF CHOICE:

NOTES: COLD-BLOODED KILLER WHO WON'T THINK TWICE ABOUT PUTTING ONE IN THE BACK OF THE HEAD OF HIS ENEMIES.

TURN-ONS: "PREYING ON YOU AND OTHERS WITH WEAK SCREEN NAMES."

FAVORITE PREY: CHAOS RAPTOR

MANTRA: ONLY IN DEATH DOES DUTY END.

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE
gamespy
THQ

IS WORLD OF WARCRAFT THE BREAKOUT ONLINE GAME EVERYONE'S BEEN WAITING FOR? WE SPENT TWO DAYS PLAYING IT TO FIND OUT

BLIZZARD'S BRAVE NEW WORLD

SITE: BLIZZARD
: BLIZZARD
: MMORPG
: LATE 2004

BY JEFF GREEN & THIERRY NGUYEN

This monastery is one of the strongholds of the Scarlet Crusade—overzealous Undead killers who now kill anything that approaches them—including you.

We understand if you're skeptical. We were skeptical too. Because let's face it: What was supposed to be PC gaming's next great frontier—online massively multiplayer games—is becoming a bit of a bust. With one high-profile, hugely hyped massively multiplayer game after another coming out and then failing to deliver, we figure you're as sick of reading about them as we are of writing about them.

That is why, in agreeing to do a cover story on Blizzard Entertainment's upcoming massive multiplayer game *World of WarCraft*, we established one primary condition: We had to be able to play the game for hours, as freely as we wanted and with any characters we wanted to create. We also needed all the remaining details—like unannounced classes and races—Blizzard has been keeping secret. No promises or hype or smoke and mirrors.

So in early July, with the game on the verge of going into beta two years after Blizzard first announced it, we took a flying machine down to Blizzard's office in Irvine, California, for two marathon *World of WarCraft* playing sessions.

Two days later, they had to tear us away from the machines.

The smell of success

The air is heavy at the Blizzard offices when we arrive—and not just from the smell of unwashed black gaming T-shirts. The tension is high. The stress is palpable. The team—now at more than 50 people—is obviously in full-on work mode. Most only emerge from their offices and cubes twice in our two days there: once when a giant tray of ribs arrives, and again when a stack of pizzas are delivered.

They have good reason to be tense. In translating their best-selling strategy series to an online massively multiplayer role playing game, in which gamers pay a monthly fee to live in an online world, Blizzard is venturing into a genre now

Gryphon rides are rendered in real time, so you can see events transpiring below you.

Scooter and Jeff, disguised as Orcs, get ready for their weekly comic book run.

increasingly littered with failures and disappointments. Copies of *Star Wars Galaxies* sit on practically every desk, and while no one at Blizzard would be so undiplomatic as to criticize the competition in the presence of a game journalist, no one was openly singing its praises either. (And neither are we. See our review on page 110.) As a growing number of developers are now finding out, creating an entire world is not an easy job—nor is it a guarantee of success.

Still, this is Blizzard we're talking about. You don't create the *WarCraft*, *Diablo*, and *StarCraft* franchises by being stupid, or even just lucky. The true genius of those franchises is that they are hardcore games made utterly accessible to newbies—which is exactly the sort of thing the MMORPG genre is lacking. And, sure enough, from the second they sit us down at our PCs and let us boot up the game, it's clear even in a pre-beta stage that we're once again going to be in good hands.

So, enough of our yakking. Let's look at the game already!

For the Alliance

As in all MMORPGs, your first job in *World of WarCraft* is to create your character, your persona who will live and fight and grow in Azeroth, Blizzard's war-torn fantasy universe. In keeping with Blizzard's long-standing design philosophy, character creation is butt simple: Pick a race and class (see the sidebars "Race War" and "Class War" for a breakdown of the new stuff), pick a name, customize your look, and you're in. No fiddling with numbers or deciding on religious factions or any number of other chores with which other MMORPGs bog down the game's beginning and alienate or overwhelm newbies. In less than five minutes of sitting down with the game for the first time, and with no tutorial, manual, or cheat sheet of keyboard commands, we created our first characters—a Night Elf rogue and Dwarf paladin (both new classes)—and were off and running in Azeroth.

BLIZZARD IS VENTURING INTO A GENRE INCREASINGLY LITTERED WITH DISAPPOINTMENTS.

To keep things simple, Blizzard gives us just one cheat: We start from the same location, the Dwarf starting zone of Anvil Marr. In actuality, all races will have their own starting zone, so the Dwarf and Night Elf would have had to trek a-ways to find each other. (The game's built-in buddy and e-mail functions, however, allow you to invite players instantly into your group, no matter where they are.) To keep things consistent with the

ABOMINATION QUEST

Perhaps the coolest quest we saw starts with a little hermit located out in the boonies of Duskwood. He'll make you travel to faraway places, kill strange things, and get weird items, but he'll always give you a good reward. After you slog through several sessions for his quests, he finally asks you to deliver a letter to the mayor of Duskwood. It's when you deliver the letter that you find out you helped create an Abomination—one that's about to rampage through town.

As the Abomination makes its way through town, guards helplessly throw themselves at it at set points. Any other player in town can take part in bringing down the Abomination. The Abomination gives decent experience but not unique loot, meaning it's worthwhile to fight and help kill it, but it won't cause players to squabble over kill-stealing.

This quest is repeatable, but since it's such a lengthy process to activate the Abomination and requires someone to actively do the quest, veterans can't camp and wait for the Abomination to appear.

This is the perfect example of a *WOW* quest, as it displays the scripted, story line quality of a single-player RPG but has the social hooks of an MMORPG. Instead of missing out on the Abomination because you didn't log on at the right time of the month, you can now wait until some poor schmuck does it for you.

TRAVELING THROUGH AZEROTH

When you want to zip on over to Anvilmar from Stormwind, or zip from Duskwood to Red Bluffs, *WOW* offers quite a few options besides merely hoofing it on foot.

As in other MMOs, big ships sail preset courses at regular intervals. Higher-level players can also use race-specific mounts. Confirmed mounts so far are horses for Humans, rams for Dwarves, nightsabers for Night Elves (à la the priestess of the moon hero unit), wolves for Orcs, and nightmares (demonic horses) for the Undead. At press time, the specifics of the Gnomes and Trolls haven't yet been concepted. Since Taurens are too big to ride an animal, they are getting Plains Running, which allows them to run as fast as a mount. Mounts are expensive and require skill points to ride, so the Taurens' natural Plains Running is something of an advantage for the race.

There are also the gryphons and wind runners (new name for wyverns), which help you get across vast tracts of land. You find a tamer in one town and pay him to let you ride the beast along a set route to another part of the world. Routes are faction-specific, meaning Orcs will never get to fly to Stormwind Keep, but goblins will let any player fly along their routes for extra cash. For now, all Alliance races (except Night Elves) use gryphons, while Night Elves use hyppogryphs. All Horde races except Undead fly wind runners, while the Undead fly an unnamed (at press time) bat-like creature. While you can't control the gryphon, your flight is still rendered in real time, at the moment that it happens. That means you might fly over a high-level area and see players down below running around and hunting. And they can look up at your ugly mug to see you flying above.

All races except Taurens can ride mounts. Here's an Orc warrior on a wolf. Mounts are race specific, but players can spend skill points to learn how to ride mounts of other races.

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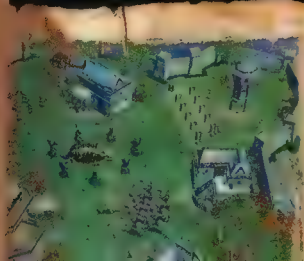

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We are Night Elves. We are beautiful. This is our kitty.

Scooter, the Orc warlock, conjures a felhound as a pet.

Grelin Whitebeard
Aargh! Those Light-blasted trolls!
He takes a few breaths and seems to settle down a bit.
A group of them came in the night and stole my supplies! I knew better than to trust that good-for-nothing appr
QUEST REWARDS
Choose your reward
Amilmar Knife
One-Hand
Dagger
5 - 7 Damage
Speed 1.60
Level 4 (min 1)
When an NPC offers a quest, you can see before accepting what your reward will be.

BLIZZARD HAS TRULY REALIZED ITS GOALS WITH THE GRAPHICS: IT FEELS LIKE YOU'RE INSIDE *WARCRAFT*.

strategy games, by the way, Alliance races can only group with other Alliance players, and the same goes for the Horde. Early reports that an Orc player may be able to group with a Human, for example, have proven false.

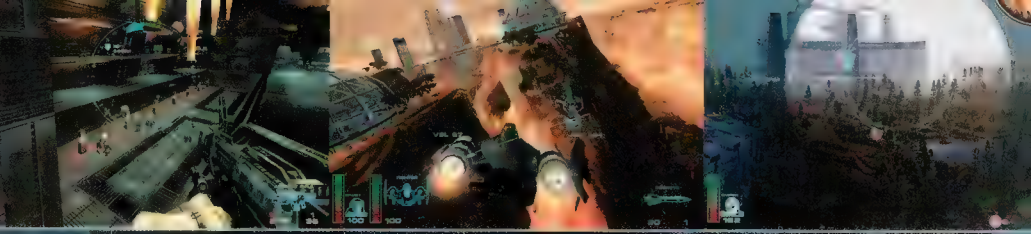
Once inside Azeroth for the first time, we take a few minutes just to look around. And immediately feel like a couple of backwoods Okies getting our first glimpse of a big city. In short, the game world is beautiful. Blizzard has truly realized its goals with the game's graphics: It really feels like you're inside the *WarCraft* strategy games. The landscape and architecture boast Blizzard's distinctive painterly, slightly surreal perspective—not quite realistic, but not overly cartoony either. Character animations are also brilliantly realized, with each player race exhibiting distinctive gaits and expressions. Over the next two days, we try out a number of different characters, and each feels completely different: the lurching, zombified Undead; the lithe, graceful Night Elves; the lumbering, bull-like Tauren. We don't want to attach too much importance to eye candy here, but the game's look is indeed a major achievement—it looks unlike any other game you've ever played.

Ready to work

We're not in Azeroth to admire the scenery, however. We want to do stuff. Kill stuff. Become überbadasses in this fantasy world. And right away, Blizzard delivers where most MMORPGs have so far failed. There is no random wandering around looking for someone to talk to. No consulting a website for a clue as to where a decent newbie quest might be found. No three-hour "farming" of bats and rats to kill until we're sufficiently leveled up to start playing the real game.

Instead, *World of WarCraft* opens almost as if it's a single-player RPG—giving you very specific goals, cool rewards, and an easy, gradual introduction to the world around you. In fact, if you want a succinct description of our *World of WarCraft* experience, think not of other MMORPGS, but instead of, well, two other Blizzard games: *Diablo II* and the recent RPG-like Orc campaign in *The Frozen Throne*, in which Thrall and other NPCs send you out on a series of increasingly more difficult missions, while giving you pieces of a larger story at work.

World of WarCraft takes its quest interface almost straight from *WarCraft III*. NPCs with quests to offer appear in the



EXTINCTION IS NOT AN OPTION

It's a comfortable shooter that's easy to pick up, features sharp graphics and provides challenging gameplay.
- GameSpot

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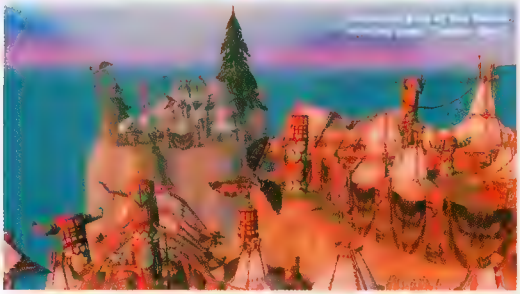
A group of player characters traveling via wolves through Durotar.

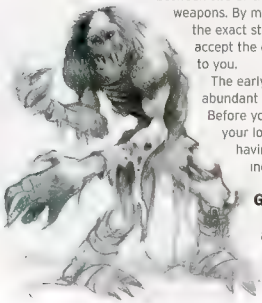


Tauren villages boast cool Native American–style architecture.

world with large yellow exclamation points above their heads, just like in the strategy game. As soon as you warp into Azeroth for the very first time, you'll see such an NPC right in front of you.

To receive a quest, you simply right-click on the NPC to initiate a dialogue, and you get a description of the quest, exactly what you need to solve it, and what your reward will be when you do. Most quests offer a choice of rewards, say, between two or three pieces of armor, or maybe a choice of weapons. By mousing over the reward options, you can see the exact stats of what you'll be fighting for before you accept the quest, and decide whether it's even worth it to you.

The early *World of WarCraft* quests are easy and abundant (Blizzard says it's written hundreds so far). Before you know it, you have three or four quests in your log and the unique MMORPG experience of having to pick what to do first rather than spending five hours looking for something to do.



MOST QUESTS GIVE YOU A CHOICE OF REWARDS—SAY, BETWEEN A FEW PIECES OF ARMOR.

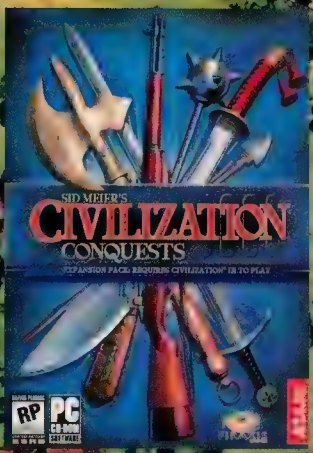
Game philosophy 101

The focus on quests does a number of things all at once. First, it allows Blizzard to keep telling its stories of Azeroth in a nonlinear fashion. As *WarCraft* veterans know, Azeroth is more than just a generic fantasyland with bats in it. It's a richly detailed, complex fantasy world with a dramatic ongoing story line. While part of the point of a MMORPG is to let players craft their own tales, Blizzard has its own agenda and will keep the story line going over time.

Second, it gives Blizzard an organic way to "breadcrumb" players, as the company puts it, to new areas of the game world. Newbie quests keep you right by your starting zone and are easy kill or delivery missions. But as you begin to level up, the quests get more complex (see the "Abomination Quest"

Nine new opportunities to ask the historical question, "What if?"

ATARI



"AS IF I NEEDED ANOTHER REASON TO KEEP PLAYING THIS GAME... GMPC

Coming October 2003

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PC CD ROM

FIRAXIS

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PLAYER VERSUS PLAYER

Yes, you will be able to battle other human players in *WOW*. Associate designer Jeffrey Kaplan says, "PvP will be entirely consensual! No player will ever get attacked without willingly entering a designated PvP area or committing to a duel. The current plan is to have Arena-style PvP fighting (group versus group, player versus player). We also want to have 'pocket' battlefield zones. In these zones, players will fight for their alliance with some strong objective in mind. We want players to quickly get back into combat without long downtimes. Our spawn system will also allow players to fight alongside NPCs, take over towns, and convert them over to their alliance. As for 'with-in-faction duels, we hope to support this."

The Dead Forest or Amsterdam after three space cakes?

An Undead mage hurls a fireball at a big icky spider.

sidebar for a great example) and have you venturing out into the world at large. Before you know it—somewhere around the time you hit level 5—you'll have abandoned your starting zone completely, without even realizing it's happened.

This leads to the third and most important goal of the quest structure: It takes the focus away, and gets your eyes off, the dreaded XP bar. Make no mistake: *World of WarCraft*, like any other MMORPG, is largely about leveling up. Hitting that next level is still the big event—you'll get new abilities, spells, points to spend, and so on. Blizzard has not reinvented the wheel here. But what the company has tried to do—and, from our early impression, succeeded in doing—is to make that wheel a lot more entertaining. By keeping your quest book filled with smaller goals with the carrot-and-stick promise of tangible, cool loot dangling in front of you, Blizzard keeps your minute-to-minute gameplay experience fresh and rewarding—rather than making you long impatiently for that one fleeting moment of glory every two or 10 or 40 hours.

Before we started playing, Blizzard told us that one of its goals was to achieve what it did in *Diablo II*—make *World of WarCraft* so fun that "level ups" come as a surprise. We'll be darned if that didn't happen a number of times throughout our two days of playing.

Further distractions

When you do level up, you get those glorious new skills, points, and stats. Blizzard decided early on that each class' core skill points would go up automatically. Thus, a warrior will automatically get a set increase in Strength, for example, upon hitting a specific level, rather than the player misappropriating points in a useless category.

To allow for customization, however, without which this game wouldn't be much of an RPG, Blizzard includes two other sets of skills you can tweak as you please: talents and secondary skills.

Talent points allow you to add a small bit of extra points pertinent to your character's specific class—adding more mana regeneration to mages or priests, for example, or specialization in a particular weapon type for hunters or warriors.

Secondary skills are the more crucial, and will likely be where many players focus much (and in some cases, probably all) of their game time. Depending on your race and class, you'll be able to specialize in a number of diverse skills, such as first aid, alchemy, cooking, languages, herbalism, mounts, and lockpicking. The point, again, is to avoid the level grind and make the world more interactive. As with the quests, the rewards for specialization in secondary skills come early and often. Once Jeff's Tauren druid took a side speciality in herbalism, for example, it was hard for him to stay focused on the larger quests at hand, because he was too excited about hunting for flowers that would yield him the key to specific magic recipes. An Orc player specializing in mounts will, at higher levels, be able to ride creatures normally available only to Alliance players. And a lockpick expert will be able to open treasure chests—often with unique, valuable loot—scattered throughout the world. Other players will have zero access to those treasures.

Playing with others

And what about those other players? *World of WarCraft*, more than any other MMORPG we've tried, plays much more like a single-player RPG—something Blizzard designed very much on purpose. Blizzard actually designed the game so that the

RACE WAR

As *WarCraft* veterans know, Azeroth's various races are divided into two opposing forces (though, since *WarCraft III*, there's been a tentative détente): the "good" Alliance and the formerly-bad-but-now-mostly-sympathetic Horde. There are now eight races total in *World of WarCraft*—four for each side. Along with the previously announced Humans, Night Elves, and Dwarves, the Alliance now includes one new race: Gnomes, little dudes who make the Dwarves look gigantic. On the Horde side, Orcs and Taurens are joined by the just-announced Trolls and Undead.

Both the Gnomes and Trolls are brand new, so Blizzard didn't have much to show, but the Undead, happily, were quite far along. As in *WarCraft III*, the Undead are former Humans transformed into zombies by the evil Burning Legion as part of their plot to conquer Azeroth. Undead players in *World of WarCraft* are not allied with the Burning Legion (still the universe's überbad guys), but are more like a somewhat-less-evil splinter Undead group. Still, Undead players are the closest to an evil race, with much darker quests and stories to pursue. Also, while the Alliance and Horde are separated by a language gap—in addition to native tongues, all Alliance races speak Common, while all Horde races speak Orcish, and neither side can understand the other—the Undead, as former Humans, begin the game with the advantage of understanding both. You may be Undead, but you're a linguistic scholar!

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Single white Night Elf with glowing eyes and bulging biceps seeks single female for good times. No Taurens.

"outside world" is indeed conquerable by solo players. No outdoor territories are too dangerous for those who want to play alone. Furthermore, while there are plenty of tough monsters in the outside areas, none will yield any of the kind of unique "phat lewt" for which other players will want to camp or steal or grief other players.

For the cooler rewards, the best loot, the most XP, and the toughest monsters, you have to group with others and venture underground or into the caverns of *WOW*'s 100-plus "micro dungeons" or 20-plus giant dungeons—the biggest of which might take a guild full of players an entire real-world week to clear out.

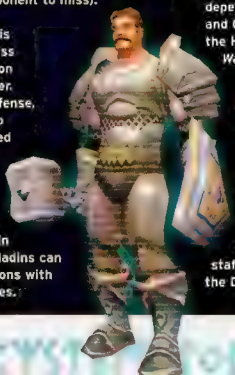
We found a few of the smaller dungeons to be pretty brutal, inhabited by what the designers call "plus mobs." While the monsters in outdoor zones are all level appropriate for solo players, "plus mobs" monsters may each be 7 to 10 levels above you—or, in other words, instant death if you aren't grouped with other players. As such, the gameplay in the dungeons is much slower, more strategic, and more

CLASS WAR

Blizzard has now officially finalized the list of classes available to players when *World of WarCraft* ships. There are nine in all, including the three—the rogue, paladin, and priest—announced here. In addition, Blizzard is also adding "hero" classes—high-level specialty classes similar to those found in *WarCraft III*.

ROGUE: Your standard stealthy rogue, but the most damaging in direct offense; warriors are the tanks who can take damage, but rogues are the ones who deliver damage. In addition to a bunch of slick attack moves (backstab, swift strikes, sap/knockouts), rogues can also poison their weapons (either enhancing damage or adding damage-over-time effects) and use disguises to get past enemies.

PRIEST: These guys are different than traditional clerics, typically chainmail-wearing badasses that heal. Priests can only wear cloth armor, but their spells are based on messing with your target's mind. Besides being the best healer and buffer in the game, the other priest powers (into either Shadow or Holy Magic) make him seem more like an inquisitor than a medicine cabinet. Priests use Shadow/Holy Words, which are instant-cast and include: Dominate (make an enemy become your pet), Confusion (stops attacking), and Fumble (causes your opponent to miss).



PALADIN: This Alliance-only class is the combination tank/healer/buffer. Heavy on the defense, paladins can also create seals (fixed areas that provide useful benefits) and auras (such as the Devotion or True Sight aura in *WarCraft III*). Paladins can also imbue weapons with magical properties.

WARRIOR: Simple, straightforward tanking. Can use any weapon, wear any armor, and take the most damage of any class. Fancy attack moves include Whirlwind (similar to the Orc blademaster), Shouts (which de/buff, depending on target), and Combat Stances (Defensive is much like the Human footmen Defend ability in *WarCraft III*).

HERO: Just about to be implemented are the Hero classes. Once you hit level 40 or so, you can start specializing in skills to become the same kind of hero units found in the *WarCraft III*. Of course, besides skills, there are race and class restrictions to keep in mind. For example, it will be the dwarven fighter who becomes the Mountain King (a favorite among the Blizzard staff), or the Night Elf Hunter who becomes the Demon Hunter.

A dwarf mines for gems in the mostly interactive environment.

Marshal McBride
Kobold Camp Cleanup
Kobolds have infested the woods to the north of you. Kill 7 of the grimy Vermin for me, then you'll have my thanks, citizen.
Quest Objective:
Kill 7 Kobold Vermin, then return to Marshal McBride
Quest Rewards:
You will receive:
Minor Healing Potion
Accept
Decline

As in *WarCraft III*, NPCs with quests to offer appear with yellow exclamation marks.

cooperative than that outdoors—but the rewards are much greater.

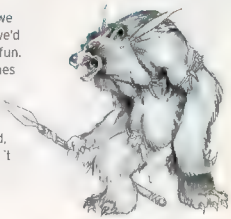
The best part about all these dungeons, large and small, is that they are yours and yours alone, created for your specific use when triggered by a quest. Anyone in your party can join in the "instance" (as Blizzard calls it) of your dungeon, and you can even send messages to friends outside the dungeon, inviting them in. (And should you disconnect accidentally, as we did, you'll land right back in the dungeon—not 800 miles away.) This applies to the game's largest Überdungeons as well, which Blizzard has tailored specifically for large guild-style raids. No "raid collision" is even possible in *World of WarCraft*—guilds won't have to camp the game's biggest monsters, because every guild can create its own instance.

Off we go, then

Unfortunately, we have only scratched the surface here. If we could, we'd go on for 10 more pages. Actually, if we could, we'd really still be at Blizzard's office playing the game. It's *that* fun. It was everything that made *Diablo II* and the *WarCraft* games so addictive, and more. And that's the bottom line.

The biggest worry all along might have been that Blizzard would be out of its depth here, in a tough genre in which it has no experience. Instead, Blizzard has taken genre and done the best thing it could possibly have done: made a Blizzard game.

The beta is coming soon. Get ready.



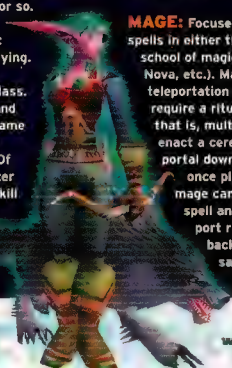
DRUID: The jack-of-all-trades and master-of-none. The main deal with druids is their ability for shapeshifting, with each animal being roughly equivalent to a class. Your "natural" form is the one that casts all the basic heal/buff spells. Your cat form transforms you into a makeshift rogue, the bear form turns you into a warrior tank, the flying form lets you, well, zip around fast, and the scout form transforms you into an "ambient" lifeform (such as a little bunny), depending on the environment you're in, so you can look around and check things out without being noticed. Other forms being implemented include an aquatic form and a tree form.

WARLOCK: The spellcaster class that gets a pet (they get their pets the earliest, in fact). Early on, warlocks get to summon felhounds; later, they can summon imps and succubi. Those three pets last until they die, and then you can just re-summon them. Later on, the warlock can summon big creatures like doom guards or infernals, but only for about a minute or so. Besides pets, warlock spells focus on damage over time, such as Lifetap and Mana Siphon, which drain their targets to benefit the warlock over the course of a minute or so. Warlocks can also create Soul Stones, which resurrect you right on the spot after dying.

HUNTER: The "ranger" class. Hunters learn how to tame and track beasts, and can then tame anything in the game that's considered to be a "beast." Of course, the cooler the monster is, the higher one's taming skill needs to be. But if you get tired of having a dog/wolf/bear or whatnot, you'll want to train to get something like a giant scorpion or a basilisk of some sort. Hunters are also the best with ranged weapons—some use bows and others use guns.

SHAMAN: The Horde-only magic user that uses totems and elemental/spiritual magic. While you got some decent healing and buffing spells, you also get cool totems that you plant onto the ground. These range from stasis fields to sentry wards or healing wards (as in *WarCraft III*). The shaman can also use the astral recall spell, which zaps you back to your last bindstone.

MAGE: Focused on direct-damage spells in either the Fire or the Frost school of magic (Fireball, Frost Nova, etc.). Mages can also create teleportation portals, but those require a ritual to be effective; that is, multiple mages must enact a ceremony to place a portal down in a city, but once placed, any mage can cast a spell and teleport right back to said city.

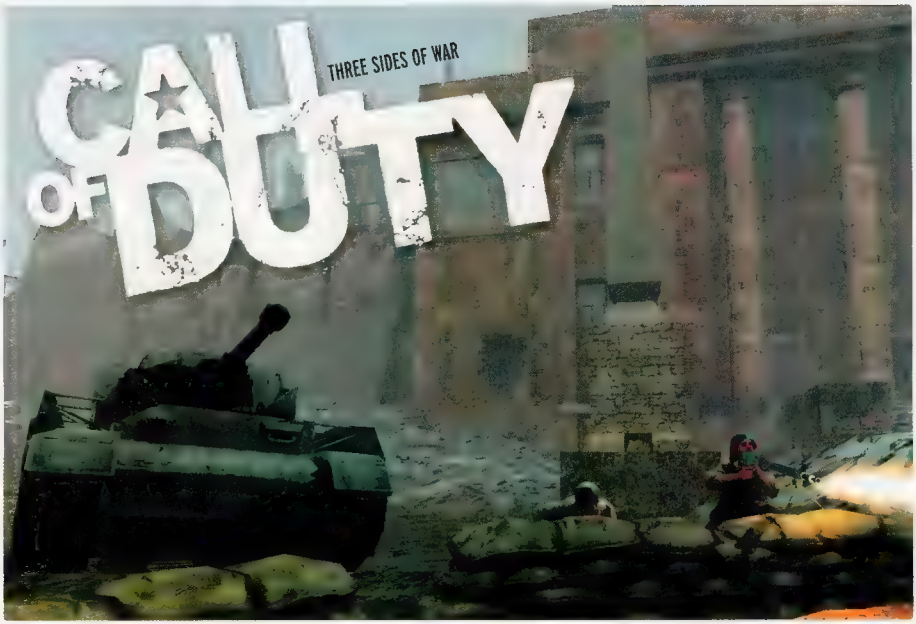


WORLD WAR II SHOOTER SHOWDOWN

★ BY KEN BROWN ★

Who will win the battle of the WWII shooters? See for yourself with our special combat report on CALL OF DUTY and MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT. Plus, two days of hell at DALE DYE'S BOOT CAMP.

CALL OF DUTY
MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT

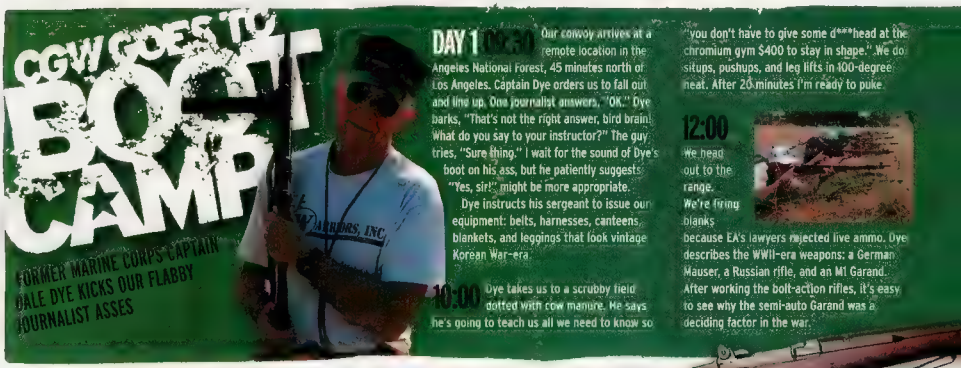


If you liked *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, you'll go apeshit over *Call of Duty*, the upcoming WWII combat shooter from Activision. It's like taking *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* and stabbing it in the ass with a quart of adrenaline. There are just more of the things you'd want from a *MOH*-style game: dramatic scripted events, more team-based action, tougher enemy A.I., and a greater combat feel.

So why don't they call it *Medal of Honor 2*? Because EA would take a dump in Activision's mess kit, since they own the rights to that franchise. When EA took its ball back from 2015 and decided to develop *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault* internally, 23 members of the 2015 team left to form a new studio called Infinity Ward. These guys have the experience and talent to improve on the *MOH* experience, and they have something to prove: They want to build a better WWII shooter and beat EA at its own game.

THREE PERSPECTIVES

The first thing that sets *Call of Duty* apart is that it divides the single-player game into three campaigns: You'll play as an American soldier, a Russian conscript, and a British commando through 21 levels, many of which recreate actual historical


CGW GOES TO
BOOT CAMP
FORMER MARINE CORPS CAPTAIN DALE DYE KICKS OUR FLABBY JOURNALIST ASSES
DAY 1
08:30
Our convoy arrives at a remote location in the Angeles National Forest, 45 minutes north of Los Angeles. Captain Dye orders us to fall out and line up. One journalist answers, "OK." Dye barks, "That's not the right answer, bird brain. What do you say to your instructor?" The guy tries, "Sure thing." I wait for the sound of Dye's boot on his ass, but he patiently suggests "Yes, sir!" might be more appropriate.
Dye instructs his sergeant to issue our equipment: belts, harnesses, canteens, blankets, and leggings that look vintage Korean War–era.
10:00
Dye takes us to a scrubby field dotted with cow manure. He says he's going to teach us all we need to know so
"you don't have to give some d***head at the chromium gym $400 to stay in shape." We do situps, pushups, and leg lifts in 100-degree heat. After 20 minutes I'm ready to puke.
12:00
We head out to the range. We're firing blanks because EA's lawyers rejected live ammo. Dye describes the WWII–era weapons: a German Mauser, a Russian rifle, and an M1 Garand. After working the bolt-action rifles, it's easy to see why the semi-auto Garand was a deciding factor in the war.

One of the more cinematic levels from *Call of Duty*.

The chase scenes are among the game's best levels.

CALL OF DUTY'S ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS VASTLY IMPROVED OVER ALLIED ASSAULT'S.

battles. Obviously, each perspective gives players an opportunity to experience a different aspect of the war, along with different weapons and tactics. The Americans have good weapons and fight as a unit; the Russians have bolt-action rifles and have to scrounge for ammo; and the British have small teams who must use speed and wits to meet their objectives.

The missions vary considerably within the campaigns. In one U.S. mission, your squad must infiltrate a burning village in Normandy to take out AA crews who are chewing up aircraft on D-Day. The ruins are infested with German units supported by MG42s, so it's a hard fight in and you're constantly scrambling for cover. In another mission, your squad races through enemy lines in a beat-up Peugeot while being chased by Kubelwagons loaded with enemy soldiers firing MP40s. It's a thrilling level reminiscent of the truck getaway in *MOH: Spearhead* or some of the scenes from *Force 10 From Navarone*. One of the exclusive levels we saw was blazing through a German-occupied chateau à la *The Dirty Dozen*, in which players were kicking down doors, dodging around corners, and just trying to get out alive (without a well-timed grenade throw, it ain't that easy).

Although the designers seem to have a flair for the cinematic, they don't make unnecessary concessions for

Stick your head up in the trenches and it'll get blown off.

13:00 Lunchtime. Dye teaches us how to eat MREs (Meal Ready to Eat). "Rip open the bag and stick the contents in your neck." My entree is a surprisingly good steak in mushroom sauce.

14:00 We assemble for formation drills: stand at attention, left face, right face, about face, etc. The drills seem endless, and the heat doesn't help. We look like recruits from the short bus.

17:00 Dye's second in command, a Vietnam War vet, teaches us how to perform an assault. He forms two teams that leapfrog each other, one firing prone while the other runs. It's exhausting and painful, and everything that can go wrong does. During my run I wind up about 50 feet from the guy I started next to. The Lieutenant tells me to go recover my Garand clips in the trees about half a mile away.

18:30 We stick more MREs in our necks.

19:30 Dye lays out our sleeping positions in a defensive perimeter. He points to an area nearby where a mountain lion was sighted and says, "If you see a mountain lion, yell. One of us will come out with a weapon and take care of it."

20:30 We take rifles out to the field to practice night-firing exercises. The two-foot muzzle flash is blinding, so Dye teaches us how to aim, squeeze the trigger, close our eyes, fire, and aim again.

21:30 We gather by the fire and hear what's in store for the next day. "You'll be firing submachine guns and you will be sexually stimulated."

22:00 The staff turns in for the night. I have the first watch, from 10:00 to 11:30. Dye comes out around 11:00 with a .45mm pistol and lies down on the ground. I feel sorry for anything that bites him.

DAY 2 06:00 The lieutenant yells "Reveille!" We stumble out of bed feeling like crap and gulp down gallons of water.

07:00 We assemble for P.T. in addition to the usual >>>

Leaning is crucial in close confines like this chateau.

playability. You'll only be allowed two barreled weapons at a time, plus a pistol and grenades, which enhances realism and adds another element to the challenge.

In contrast to *Allied Assault*, most of the levels here involve squad-based action. You get orders from the captain and your team will cover or advance together. The enemy and friendly A.I. are vastly improved over *MOH's:* Enemy soldiers use cover and concealment, so you have to be sharp, use cover, and take advantage when your team offers suppressing fire. If you don't fight smart, you're dead.

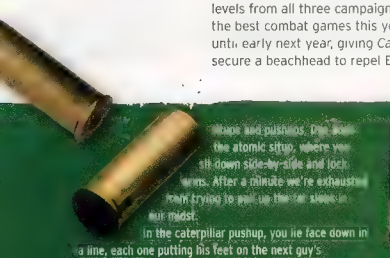
But Infinity Ward has thrown some new tricks in your bag. You can now lean around corners or go totally prone. You can also—*gasp!*—take aim down the barrel of your weapon by using mouse button two. It's such an obvious feature, we wonder why other combat games have overlooked it.

The game isn't finished yet, but after playing through several levels from all three campaigns, it looks like this will be one of the best combat games this year. *Medal of Honor* won't ship until early next year, giving *Call of Duty* several months to secure a beachhead to repel EA's next assault.

Charging the Krauts is standard fare in *Allied Assault.*

Barry prepares a cold reception for the Red Army.

Squad movement has a realistic feel.



...shups and pushups. One is the atomic situp, where you sit down side-by-side and lock arms. After a minute we're exhausted, even trying to pull up the fat slugs in our midst.

In the caterpillar pushup, you lie face down in a line, each one putting his feet on the next guy's shoulders. I get the biggest guy's hamhocks on my shoulder and can't get up. The sergeant suggests I have the mental fortitude of a garden slug.

07:45 We run while the marching is cool. Five miles at a cadence and sings drill instructor songs while we echo the refrain: "Birdy on the windowsill, purty little beak and purty little bill, fed him some bacon and I fed some bread, and then I crushed his mother!" "Hoo, hoo-ah!" We run three miles to my amazement.

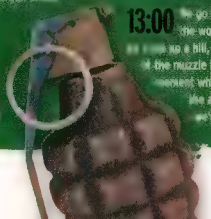
09:00 We fire submachine guns: a German MP40, British Sten, and Thompson. After 10 minutes I see liquid sizzling on the Thompson's wooden stock. One of the sergeants, War vets relates how the machine gun barrels used to turn white and droop like a piece of rubber. Captain Shuster tells me modern machine gun crews carry cross belts and extra barrels.

10:00 We throw grenades. The instructs us to simulate pulling the pin, toss at a target about 30 feet away, and duck behind cover. I imagine I'm John Wayne in *The Sands of*

...two times and pull the pin. I hit the target but overthrow and explode everyone's butt. Oops.

12:00 We teaches us how to use a compass and fix our location on a grid map. It requires some intelligence to do properly. He says that the Army maintenance convoy in which Pvt. Jessica Lynch was riding didn't have a compass and that the officer in charge didn't know how to use one. His GPS system was out, when the convoy made its wrong turn into An-Nasiriya.

13:00 We go on patrol in a staggered formation into the woods, and the staff springs an ambush on us from up a hill, find cover behind a tree, and fire a shot at the muzzle flash of the enemy. It was the one moment when I felt like an effective soldier, but in the after-action reports the ambushers said we'd all have been killed then.



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MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT

EA TAKES ON A MASSIVE CHALLENGE IN THE JUNGLES OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC

EA has kept the lid clamped tight on its *Medal of Honor* sequel, *Pacific Assault*. EA Los Angeles studio head Rick Giolito says we were the first people outside of Electronic Arts to even see it. This means you, not-so-gentle reader, will be the first to read about it.

Despite being in the catbird seat, we were skeptical about what we would see. This team didn't create *Allied Assault* (see *Call of Duty*), and it was given only about 15 months to develop its sequel. It often takes more than two years to complete a project this ambitious—the game features a new theater, new locations, overhauled graphics, and vastly different tactics; in short, it's an entirely new experience.

Is the team up to the challenge? It certainly appears so.

Senior producer Matt Powers is the officer in charge of Pacific Assa

So, what did I learn from my boot camp experience? Fighting is hard work. Just running up a low hill with a pack is exhausting. Soldiers who survive a war aren't stupid. And anyone who lived through frontline combat in WWII has physical and mental toughness that is almost beyond belief.

The biggest lesson I learned was to be glad combat games aren't any more realistic than they are. Most gamers couldn't hack the real thing.

CAPTAIN DALE DYE, USMC, RETIRED

Dale Dye is a highly decorated war veteran who survived 31 major combat operations in Vietnam. Dye has been serving as a military advisor to the entertainment industry since the 1986 Oscar-winning movie *Platoon*. He has been a technical advisor for *Saving Private Ryan*, *Band of Brothers*, *JFK*, *Natural Born Killers*, and EA's *Medal of Honor* games.

Next year, he will again be working with Spielberg, this time on *Band of Brothers 2*, a 20-episode project set in the South Pacific and budgeted at $230 million.

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A GI fortifies his area with a Japanese soldi...

The weapons [illegible] yet, obviously.

IT WAS LIKE WATCHING A WWII MOVIE MADE WITH A COMPUTER GAME.

JUNGLE BOOGIE

Wave good-bye to bombed-out Europe, you're setting sail for the South Pacific. Lead game designer Dave Nash says *PA* "is trying to hit all the major land engagements of the Pacific theater from Pearl Harbor through the end of 1943." That means island hopping through such places as Guadalcanal, New Guinea, and Tarawa, but not Iwo Jima or Okinawa, which came later in the war. EA is saving those engagements for a later add-on.

Instead of the typical lame tutorial, the game begins by dropping you into boot camp. You'll learn how to handle weapons, patch yourself up with med kits, and use hand signals. When you're in combat, you won't just run over a health kit to heal, you'll have to grab a bandage and slap it on. You'll also need to know hand signals to communicate silently.

The first combat level is, obviously, Pearl Harbor, which will be a signature level much like Omaha Beach is in *Allied Assault*. This will be the only level shared with *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* for PlayStation 2. In all other respects, the games are being developed separately by two entirely different teams.

We didn't see Pearl Harbor, but we saw levels that highlight the game's impressive technology. The levels are gigantic—five times larger than *Allied Assault* levels, replete with lush foliage that sways in the breeze. There will be both day and night operations, some of them in the rain. Water plays a big role, so programmers Paul Keet and Matt Rusch spent a lot of time working on reflectivity, refraction, and ripples that look lifelike.

The team has also been laboring on rag-doll physics, character modeling, A.I., and facial animation. Your character and the faces of those in your unit will change over time as the ravages of war take their toll. When a soldier gets killed, his body will behave according to physical principles rather than pre-scripted death animations. But don't expect to see bloody, burnt, or dismembered soldiers, because EA has once again mandated a Teen rating (curse you, corporate suits!).

They're trying to extend the realism to soldier A.I., which will be determined by a number of variables, including morale. If

[illegible] soldiers use cover well.

you kill the captain of a Japanese unit, the remaining soldiers will attack in a banzai charge because that's what they were trained to do. Producer Brady Bell demonstrated how far the A.I. has come by setting up a Japanese ambush in the jungle. With no player control, the Japanese attacked when the GIs came in range; soldiers on both sides used cover and concealment and fought together. It was like watching a WWII movie made with a computer game.

After meeting the designers and technical wizzes, we came away impressed that EA is striving to push the envelope in so many directions. The team still has to prove that these features will fuse into a great playing experience, but we feel a lot more excited about the game now. We'll bring you an exclusive hands-on look in December, but for now it appears *PA* could advance the combat shooter farther than anyone has taken it. We'll know for sure when the game ships next year.

MOH in BREAKTHROUGH

ALLIED ASSAULT ADD-ON FOLLOWS THE CAMPAIGN IN NORTH AFRICA AND ITALY

EA is putting the finishing touches on another *Allied Assault* add-on to tide *MOH* fans over until *Pacific Assault* is released. *Breakthrough* deals with some of the lesser-known battles that took place in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy from 1943 to 1944. These battles, including Kasserine Pass, Anzio, and Monte Cassino, were among the toughest for the United States. *Breakthrough* will have 11 new single-player levels with nine new multiplayer maps, plus new multiplayer modes. The add-on also boasts new weapons, soldier models, skins, and voices for American, British, and Italian troops.

The last *MOH* add-on, *Spearhead*, was a lot of fun, but it didn't last long. Senior producer Matt Powers says *Breakthrough* will deliver an even better single-player game with at least 10 to 15 hours of playing time. We played the game recently and enjoyed fighting through the lines in North Africa, commandeering tanks, and mowing down scores of troops in the Afrika Corps. If the quality level holds up, *Breakthrough* could be great—but will you really want to play an add-on when you could get *Call of Duty* instead?

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Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey

Wouldn't you rather be sitting in the cantina where Han Solo shot Greedo than in some nameless tavern?

STAR WARS GALAXIES 110

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When viewing objects closely, you'll see an impressive amount of detail.

Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided

Become the tailor of Tatooine—prospective Jedi need not apply **BY RON DULIN**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER LUCASARTS
DEVELOPER SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE MMORPG
ESRB RATING TEEN; VIOLENCE
PRICE $49.99 + $14.95 MONTHLY FEE
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM III 933, 256MB RAM, 2GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD, 56K MINIMUM CONNECTION
RECOMMENDED PENTIUM 4 1.5GHZ, 512MB RAM, GAME 3D CARD, BROADBAND CONNECTION
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT MASSIVE

For all the potential mass appeal of *Star Wars Galaxies*, it's surprising that the game is so fundamentally inaccessible. Even those who have a basic understanding of how MMORPGs traditionally work will find themselves somewhat bewildered by the game's complexity. Those new to the genre will be even more confused, not to mention they'll likely feel frustrated due to the fact that they can be a dancer, tailor, or chef, but can't just jump in as a Jedi. The complexity isn't alleviated by the meager tutorial, which offers the player only a basic grasp of the game mechanics and does little to explain the many nuances and choices that await. Needless to say, getting comfortable in *Star Wars Galaxies* can take a fair amount of time.

But it can be time well spent. Once you're acclimated to the unique skill system, you'll find that, unlike in most MMORPGs, you can create any type of character you choose. You can be a medic and a martial artist, or you can be an entertainer and a gunslinger. Or you can be a combination of all four of these, plus any of the other available skills. You can choose to spend all of your skill points (of which you have a static number) mastering one or two skills or become a jack-of-all-trades.

Blaster master

Some skills are decidedly better than others. Combat skills put you in the typical MMORPG cycle, requiring you to venture out and kill creatures so you can venture farther out and kill bigger creatures. The most novel element of the combat system is the manner in which you gain experience—it's dependent on both the weapon you have equipped and your proficiency with that weapon. So, if you have mastered sword fighting but want to improve your rifle skills, you can basically start over with your new weapon, killing the weak creatures living just outside the cities. You can become adept with a wide range of weapons or become a killing machine with one or two. The only drawback to this system is that, because the traditional concept of levels is all but gone, finding others to fight with can be somewhat difficult. But it also means that almost anyone can group together, and veterans can improve their weaker skills by teaming up with newbies.

One weapon you won't be able to master, at least not immediately, is the lightsaber—the path to becoming a Jedi is both mysterious and, according to the developers, difficult, which will be a huge disappointment for those who believed the promises on the box.

Wouldn't you rather be sitting in the cantina where Han Solo shot Greedo than in some nameless tavern on Naboo?

Noncombat skills are generally a means of making money. For instance, artisans can learn to specialize in weapons or armor or even develop into architects, chefs, or furniture makers. Because the economy is entirely player driven—it's rare that you'll find a useful item on a monster—there is a great demand for wares. The game even includes a great eBay-like auction system for selling goods you make or find.

Star bores

Unfortunately, some of these noncombat skills don't fare well. Playing as an entertainer or a medic—both of which have the thankless job of healing—can be boring and frustrating for players who don't have a wide benevolent streak. *Star Wars Galaxies* has an overly complicated damage system, which includes regular damage, battle fatigue, and wounds. Regular damage is your typical hit-point loss, which heals on its own. Battle fatigue accumulates as you fight and can be healed only by going to a cantina and watching a dancer or listening to a musician. Wounds can be healed only by medics in medical centers or campsites. It's actually even more complicated than that—for instance, there are nine types of wounds—but that's the basic idea.

The problem is that when people need healing, they don't want to pay, and the game doesn't include a means of exacting payment for services rendered. As a result, people don't want to be medics. And who can blame them? Money is somewhat hard to obtain, so why not save it for a better weapon or some armor? In less-crowded cities where medics are rare, hospitals look like free clinics, often with dozens of players sitting on the floor waiting for a single medic to heal them all, if there's even one around. It's a problem that plagued *EverQuest*, where game-design decisions seemed to have been made with no consideration for their enjoyment quotient.

Entertainers have fewer problems with deadbeats, especially female entertainers who choose to remove their clothing. It's sad yet predictable that gamers are willing to empty their

Medics play an important role but are occasionally hard to find.

It's the Stockholm Syndrome effect—learning to love your captor.

pocketbooks just because someone with an attractive avatar flirts with them, especially when they know full well it's some anonymous man who typed "/wink." Still, entertainers will find themselves virtually jailed in cantinas as they dance, dance, dance the nights away.

Finding healing in the more popular towns isn't much of a problem—finding a popular town is. Players tend to congregate in the well-known places. Mos Eisley on Tatooine, for instance, is always packed. This isn't surprising—the lack of well-known inhabitants on the other planets definitely detracts from the environment. It's more fun to be fighting dewbacks, sand people, and banthas than hunting Corellian butterflies and rabbits. Wouldn't you rather be sitting in the cantina where Han Solo shot Greedo than in some nameless tavern on Naboo? As a result, exploration is often rewarded with an unceremonious arrival at a huge, nearly empty city.

Finding your way around is easy: There's a helpful waypoint system, and objectives are marked with a towering beacon.

Industrial lights if not magic

No matter where you go, the game looks good. The cities are especially impressive. Things don't look quite as good out in the wilderness unless you have a powerful machine. The game generates the scenery as you move past it, so trees and plants spring up around you, while a bland blanket of muddy brown or green stretches toward the horizon. It's more problematic when a group of monsters suddenly springs up right next to you and you're attacked without warning.

Unfortunately, apart from honing your skills, there isn't much to do. You can take missions, but these are occasionally broken and usually somewhat boring, requiring you to deliver something or destroy some randomly generated creature habitat. You can also join the Imperials or the Rebels; declaring your alignment to either of these can have a significant impact on how nonplayer characters, and even other players, treat you.

Like all MMORPGs, *Star Wars Galaxies* can be addictive once you get started. It's the Stockholm Syndrome effect—learning to love your captor. Once you find a few trades you enjoy, the skill system is good, and there are numerous dangling carrots to keep you building one skill or another. A large-scale story has been promised for the coming months, but for now, the biggest problem facing the game is that the world, outside of the popular cities, seems rather empty. It's enjoyable, but it's just a complex version of the same old treadmill, albeit now you can get on the cooking treadmill when you get bored with fighting.

VERDICT ★★★½☆
Might get a whole lot better.

Units are forced to maintain rigid spacing if you select them together. It's nearly impossible to control them with anything resembling tactical finesse.

World War II: Frontline Command

Fight the battle of the blahs BY DI LUO

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: STRATEGY FIRST
DEVELOPER: BITMAP BROTHERS
GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY
ESRB RATING: TEEN; VIOLENCE
PRICE: $39.99 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 500, 128MB RAM, 750MB HARD DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 800, 256MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-4 PLAYERS)

Straddle the fence too long and you'll probably end up impaling yourself. The creators of *World War II: Frontline Command* tried to please everyone—from traditional RTS players to hardcore wargamers—and in doing so, they failed to please anyone. The game has the speed, action, and control scheme of a traditional RTS; the puzzle-based elements of *Commandos*; and a combat engine that seems nearly as detailed as that of the *Close Combat* series. None of them are any good, however, and we end up with an unfocused and barely playable game.

Frontline Command's most glaring problem is the unmanageable left-click interface. It's difficult to effectively manipulate your units because it takes so many clicks and drags to accomplish anything. By the time you right-click on the squad, left-click on the grenade, and then click again on the enemy to lob the grenades, the firefight will probably be over.

The controls kill most of the enjoyment, but the gameplay delivers the coup de grâce. Billed as a game with realism similar to that of the *Close Combat* games, it's about as authentic as a fat 50-year-old Asian dressing up in the period uniform of an SS trooper for reenactments. Units behave like those in any other RTS, the morale factors are meaningless, and the weapons bear no resemblance to reality. There are plenty of ridiculous situations, such as rifle fire destroying buildings and antitank bazookas destroying an entire squad of men in one hit. You quickly realize that facing, cover, and other tactical elements don't really matter; the easiest way to win is to lump all the troops together and pick off a little bit of the hapless A.I. at a time. After a while, it feels more like a puzzle game than a wargame.

While multiplayer has promise, it is limited to four players and offers no Skirmish modes against the A.I. *Frontline Command*'s best asset is the archival war footage that's unlocked as you proceed through the 20-mission campaign. If you can ignore the monotonous narrator and the unpleasantness of playing the game, it's pretty cool to watch. Maybe the developers would have been better off making a documentary.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Bad interface, boring missions, and no realism, but the documentary footage is OK!

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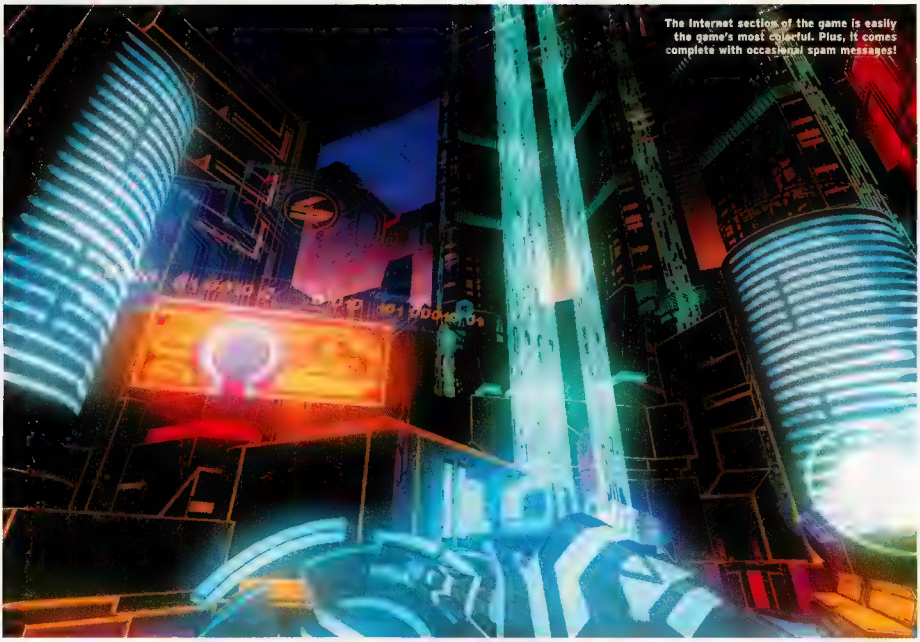


The Internet section of the game is easily the game's most colorful. Plus, it comes complete with occasional spam messages!

Tron 2.0

Trippy lights–fantastic! BY ROBERT COFFEY

EDITOR'S CHOICE COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: DISNEY INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER: MONOLITH
GENRE: SHOOTER
ESRB RATING: TEEN, VIOLENCE
PRICE: $49.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 500, 256MB RAM, 2.5GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 4 1GHZ, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-32 PLAYERS)

Here's how movie license games are supposed to work: You get a superhot, supercool property—you know, something wildly popular like *The Matrix*—and you leverage it to create an amazing game that lets gamers become a part of their favorite movie. You don't base a game on a badly aged 20-year-old G-rated movie with achingly outdated special effects and forgotten actors marching around in weird glowing felt costumes. And yet...through the strange and mysterious alchemy of game creation, it's the game starring Bruce Boxleitner and not the one starring Jada Pinkett Smith that's more deserving of your time and money this year. *Tron 2.0* is a triumphant blend of shooter action, role-playing elements, and strategy presented via some of the best graphics of the year. It's just too bad the light cycles suck, but more on that later.

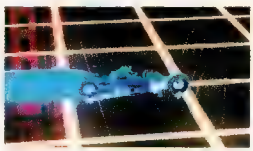
Story.exe

Unstoppable thespian dynamo Bruce Boxleitner reprises his movie role of programming genius Alan Bradley, and you are cast in the role of his son, Jet (which is short for Jethro, so it could be worse). When rival corporation fCon stages a hostile takeover and kidnaps your dad to get his top-secret correction algorithms, the artificial intelligence called Ma3a digitizes you and sets you out on a quest to recover the TRON legacy code and set things right. OK, the story isn't exactly the game's biggest strength or, actually, all that understandable, but all you really need to know is that, just like the movie, you're converted to ones and zeroes and set loose in a series of computer environments to fight for family, love, and more ethical business practices.

And those computer environments are outstanding, not just perfectly recreating the weird glowing look of the movie, but enhancing it with layered transparencies, incredibly vivid colors, and imaginative renditions of things like firewalls and hubs. Most of the game spaces sport just one or two primary colors, and yet there is such variety from level to level and in the architecture that it never seems repetitive. The graphics even have a sense of humor—one series of levels taking place on an outdated system is colored a nostalgically appropriate amber.

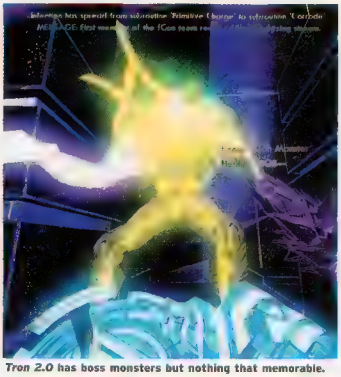
Autopatch.exe

There's plenty of shooter action filling the roughly 20 hours of gameplay, but not a lot of variety in enemies. You battle the same anthropomorphized computer villains—deadly ICP security programs, contaminant-flinging Z-Lot viruses, beefy resource hogs—over and over again, but it never feels old. This is more remarkable considering that you



Light cycle racing. Boy does it ever suck.

Lightning fast data wraiths will give you the most trouble.



Tron 2.0 has boss monsters but nothing that memorable.

have only four basic weapons with which to battle them. These successes are directly attributable to *Tron 2.0*'s RPG and strategy elements.

As you collect build notes throughout the game, you'll be able to upgrade yourself and thus allocate more resources to things like health, energy, and weapon efficiency with every upgrade. Further, you'll collect a slew of subroutines you can install in yourself, each of these coming in three progressively more effective states: alpha, beta, and gold. All the subroutines can be swapped on the fly as situations dictate, but you'll always be running at least one less than you'd like. Every system you enter will have different memory resources, requiring you to choose and rearrange the subroutines you run. Facing a horde of Z-Lots? Activate that viral shield—but you'll have to lose the LOL upgrade that turns your primitive rod weapon into a sniper rifle. The subroutines scattered throughout all the levels give the game a great, motivating *Diablo*-style object lust.

Unstoppable thespian dynamo Bruce Boxleitner reprises his movie role of programming genius Alan Bradley.

System crash

It's too bad that what is the movie's signature event—the light cycle races—grinds the game to a halt. Part of the problem is that the A.I. is capable of doing things you can't, and you lose over and over. A bigger part of the problem is that none of the camera solutions work and you lose over and over. You can't skip past the races; they're incredibly frustrating and seriously impinge enjoyment of the game. I eventually found the secret to winning these races and it sucks too: Circle the perimeter of the race grids and wait for the A.I. to beat itself. Nothing like paying $50 for a game that plays itself for you.

Other than that, there's not that much to complain about. Some of the *CGW* braintrust have struggled with the jumping sequences in the game, but I had no trouble with them and found that the rewards for the effort were almost always worth it. The game could have done better with some of the boss battles—maybe by eliminating them entirely since the game is rewarding enough on its own without the artificiality of forced boss fights.

Still, *Tron 2.0* is an outstanding game. Monolith has done such a great job with this license we can't wait to see how they salvage *The Matrix* with their upcoming online version.

VERDICT ★★★★½

The best movie-licensed game of the year is one of the best games of the year, period.

Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004: A Century of Flight

Flying first class BY JEFF LACKEY

EDITORS' CHOICE COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT
DEVELOPER: MICROSOFT GENRE: FLIGHT SIM ESRB RATING: EVERYONE PRICE: $54.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 450, 64MB RAM (128MB FOR XP/2000), 1.8GB HARD DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 4 800, 256MB RAM MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-16 PLAYERS)

Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004 may not be as sexy as *GTA: Vice City*, but it is an astonishing piece of software. You cannot buy a more accurate and detailed simulation of any kind for the PC. *MSFS2004* allows you to fly everything from the Wright *Flyer* to a Boeing 777 with remarkable realism, anywhere in the world. You can fly a Cessna on a sunny day at a small county airport or rely on instruments and an air-traffic controller to try to bring in a passenger-loaded 747 at midnight in the middle of a thunderstorm at Chicago O'Hare. There's little you can do in civil aviation that you can't simulate here.

The heart of *MSFS2004* is its unparalleled simulation of civilian flight, and this year's version has significant improvements on what was already a benchmark program. Fifteen modern aircraft are provided, ranging from sailplanes to small Cessnas to amphibians to large commercial airliners. The software admirably conveys the feel of flying these diverse airplanes via superb flight models, accurate sounds, and fully operational cockpits. Graphics outside the cockpit are quite good, with improved terrain between major landmarks and cities. The detailed airports are outstanding, and the new taxiway signs make navigating large airports a much less frustrating experience. Fully 3D virtual cockpits now allow you complete control of all buttons and switches. New Garmin 500 and 295 GPS instruments provide the plethora of functionality real-world pilots have come to depend upon, such as the location of nearest airports, controlled airspace information, and color moving maps. Air Traffic Control is significantly more functional, with the intelligence to deny take-off and landing requests from visual flight rules aircraft in instrument flight rules conditions, handle multiple requests from human and A.I. controlled aircraft, provide help for lost pilots, and more.

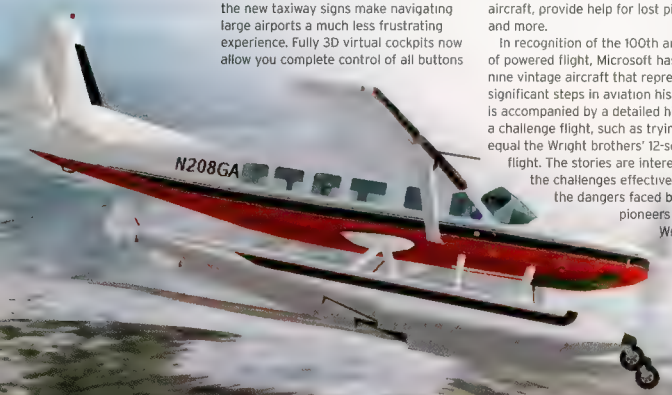
You cannot buy a more accurate and detailed simulation for the PC.

The profoundly obscured view from the cockpit of Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis*.

In recognition of the 100th anniversary of powered flight, Microsoft has included nine vintage aircraft that represent significant steps in aviation history. Each is accompanied by a detailed history and a challenge flight, such as trying to equal the Wright brothers' 12-second flight. The stories are interesting and the challenges effectively convey the dangers faced by these pioneers (e.g., the Wright *Flyer* is nearly unflyable, and Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis* is both hard to fly and had no forward view).

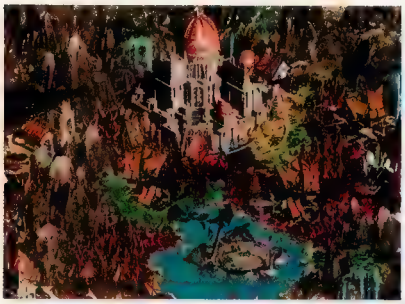
But *MSFS2004*'s real breakthrough is its magnificent dynamic-weather system. Real-world pilots quickly become weather experts—nothing else has such a dramatic impact on flight safety. *MSFS2004* can now accurately portray situations like a simple sunny flight from Cleveland turning into a nightmarish, no-visibility landing in a snowstorm in Detroit. Weather now behaves as accurately and unpredictably as, well, real-life weather. This elevates this element to the core level of importance it takes on in real aviation.

The bottom line: With enough features to fill a 747 flight manual, *MSFS2004* provides a level of flying simulation on the PC that was unimaginable even a few years ago.



VERDICT ★★★★★

The most fun you can have in a plane without guns.



Map clutter is still a problem, especially with the Legion of the Damned.

Things don't look good for the humans.

Disciples II: Guardians of the Light/Servants of the Dark

It's half price, twice BY JONAH JACKSON

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER STRATEGY FIRST
DEVELOPER STRATEGY FIRST
GENRE TURN-BASED STRATEGY ESRB RATING TEEN; MILD VIOLENCE
PRICE $19.95 EACH
REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 233, 32MB RAM, 200MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS PENTIUM II 300, 64MB RAM, 400MB HARD DRIVE SPACE MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT HOT SEAT, MODEM, DIRECT CONNECT SERIAL, LAN, INTERNET (2-4 PLAYERS)

Although *Disciples II* has fewer units and a simpler style of play than competitors such as the *Heroes* series, Strategy First has managed to produce a game that is both compelling and entertaining, and the expansions are no exception. Each expansion comes with new single-player scenarios, a random map generator, and two new mini-campaigns. *Guardians of the Light* adds campaigns for the Empire and Mountain Clan races, while *Servants of the Dark* continues the story of the Undead Hordes and the Legion of the Damned. These stand-alone expansions also include the original *Disciples II* (crippled so that only two races are playable for each expansion), and at just $19.95 apiece, they are priced to attract more newcomers to the cartoonishly stylized world of turn-based strategy.

The much-prized random map generator is actually more a kind of editor kick-start.

The new campaigns take advantage of a larger supported map size, allowing for longer and more complicated scenarios. Combined with a unique setting and competent storytelling, the new maps maintain an epic feel despite this simplicity of design. There are only a few gameplay additions and no new units or items. Observant players will notice new combat and city backgrounds and some changes in the music. The A.I. has been improved to the point that the computer opponent is actually a challenge on harder difficulty settings, although the campaigns still seem to rely on behind-the-scenes cheating to increase difficulty. Both expansions require high-level heroes, and a set of exported heroes is considerately provided for players without saved heroes from the original game.

The much-prized random map generator is part of the scenario editor enhancements. Unfortunately, it is not the full-fledged random scenario generator, but rather a kind of editor kick-start. The random generator populates maps with resources and neutral units, but adds no goals or plot triggers and mysteriously fails to fill any towns, ruins, or caves with enemies or treasure.

Strategy First has added support for 1024x768 and 1280x1024 resolutions, which improves the clarity of the main map but not backgrounds and battle scenes. Interface adjustments, including the addition of the much-needed quick-resolve Combat button, round out the changes.

As a bundle, the two expansions are a unique deal with eight full campaigns, 15 scenarios, and a map editor for less than the price of an average release. For owners of the original, these are less of a value, but still worth a look.

VERDICT ★★★★½
More cartoony goodness (and evil) at a bargain price.

Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness

Not as bad as the movie—oh wait, yes it is BY DENICE COOK

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EIDOS INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER: CORE DESIGN
GENRE: ACTION-ADVENTURE
ESRB RATING: TEEN; BLOOD, VIOLENCE
PRICE: $49.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 500, 128MB RAM, 200MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED: PENTIUM 4 1.5GHZ, 64MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: NONE

Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness tells the sordid story of five medieval paintings and their connection to a Mafioso-murdering Cabal leader who also slays the mentor of longtime *Tomb Raider* heroine Lara Croft. A pistol-toting psychic named Kurtis Trent pierces the plot as well, briefly becoming a late-game playable character and a blessing to Lara. This multilayered yarn is woven between interactive conversations and cut-scenes featuring excellent voiceovers; heavenly graphics also underscore this twisted tale's 30 levels. Lara's stunning makeover has increased her polygon count from 500 to more than 5,000, and the game's fire, water, and glass look exceptional too. Too bad all this finery is wasted on a buggy, half-designed clunker with bad controls.

Although good looking, many backdrops are industrial, and their narrow confines restrict movement. So Lara is left with little chance to swan dive, leap around enemies, or attack baddies from afar (although since many of her new guns do little ranged damage anyway, that doesn't matter as much). Now, she can't even shoot while jumping, and she no longer has her crossbow, spear gun, unlimited-ammo dual pistols, flares, binoculars, or vehicles.

Although there are a few interesting puzzles, gameplay—compared with that of earlier titles—feels stripped instead of embellished. *Tomb Raider* has very few intense battles even in Lara's later levels and Kurtis' survival-horror areas. Gone are the days of sliding down ramps and making split-second flips into secret areas. Goodies glow plainly in view or sit in unlocked cabinets, and a hand icon appears whenever there's something to interact with. Lara even verbally notes climbable surfaces and will grab them automatically. She doesn't encounter deadly traps or minibosses until the second half of the game, and many don't compare in complexity with the older *Tomb Raider* games' spike-infested hallways of hell, twisting-in-midair timed runs, frenetic rope-to-rope swings, sudden dinosaur attacks, and the like. Moreover, *Tomb Raider*'s new RPG elements are overly simplistic. They involve mandatory, timeworn *Tomb Raider* conventions such as jumping, crate pulling, and shimmying to build up Lara's body strength, enabling her to (surprise, surprise) jump farther, pull heavier things, and perform longer shimmies.

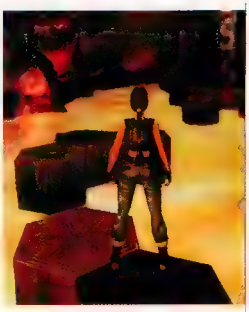
Yes, Lara can now sneak up and snap enemies' necks, crawl commando style, and peek around corners, but these moves are usually unnecessary and feel tacked on. *Metal Gear Solid* and *Splinter Cell* have done a better job with stealth (*Splinter Cell* even has unique maneuvers and cool gadgets). Plus, Lara's hand-to-hand combat is weak; she has limited moves and becomes "Leaden Limbed" Lara when attack commands are pressed.

Speaking of the controls, when Lara is lined up for multiple simple jumps with a gamepad or mouse, she spins on stairways and jerks spastically. Keyboard-only controls are smoother, but when the pace finally quickens, other problems—like the periodic framerate stutter on even a high-end PC—seem to surface. Although *Tomb Raider* unleashes a tale of Mafioso occultism, its bugs and unresponsiveness are the real crimes here. Crashes haunt later levels, and Lara often walks slowly before correctly responding to the run command, hurting timed sequences. All in all, despite its visuals and story, this *Angel* wasn't ready to fly onto store shelves.

Hand-to-hand combat moves are slow and somewhat unpredictable.

Compared with the gameplay of earlier titles, *Tomb Raider*'s feels stripped instead of embellished.

Lara beats up one of the executives responsible for her premature debut on store shelves.



The obligatory jumping puzzle with lava.

VERDICT ★★★★★

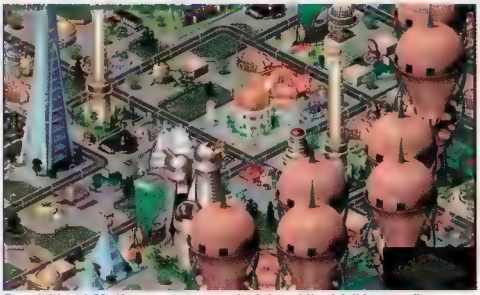
And thus gaming's highest-profile franchise is run into the ground and kicked repeatedly in the head.

Legacy Online

An economic sim by people who hate you BY THOMAS L. MCDONALD

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: OCEANUS
GENRE: ONLINE BUSINESS SIMULATION
ESRB RATING: EVERYONE
PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD + $9.95 PER MONTH
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 500, 32MB RAM, 50MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 28.8K INTERNET CONNECTION
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 700, 64MB RAM, BROADBAND CONNECTION
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: MASSIVE!



Though it's not 3D, the map can zoom and rotate and the detail is generally very good, if lacking in animation.

Legacy seems hell-bent on making you do the maximum amount of work for the minimum amount of payoff.

Legacy Online feels like a business-simulation game made by people who've never played one: There's an utter lack of easy access to vital information, a dearth of detailed charts, a complete inability to allow central management of far-flung holdings, and the curious absence of a real economy for an economic simulation. Aside from that, it's just peachy.

At first, *Legacy* seems like a game you can work with. Choose a planet, start a company, get capital, and begin building retail outlets, distribution networks, headquarters, factories, and the other trappings of a retail-manufacturing empire. You create these elements as individual structures and place them on an ersatz *SimCity*-style map, but after you build your tenth store, the thought strikes you: "I'm going to be doing the same simple task with the maximum amount of effort for the entire duration of this game."

And, indeed, you will be. *Legacy* seems hell-bent on making you do the maximum amount of work for the minimum amount of payoff. Take retail store management. It's quite easy to have 40 stores early in the game. Areas generally break into low-, medium-, and high-income zones, with commercial and industrial districts spread throughout. Since colored overlays are poorly executed, you must click on residential structures around the map to get a sense of an area's needs. Once stores are built, true frustration begins in earnest. With no central screen to view, you have to find and click on each and every store to find its sales percentiles and then tweak prices for maximum profit. A single screen where you could see profit-and-loss summaries for all your holdings is a basic feature of an economy sim, yet if one is somewhere in *Legacy Online*, it's very well hidden.

Progression through the game is based on weekly profit averages and a prestige point system, with new levels allowing access to more buildings. Interaction with other players remains minimal: While people play on the same map, there are so many business types that it's rare for two gamers to end up vying for the same sector. Later in the game, you can get involved in politics and vote on leaders, but it's a marginal and rather uninteresting aspect of the game.

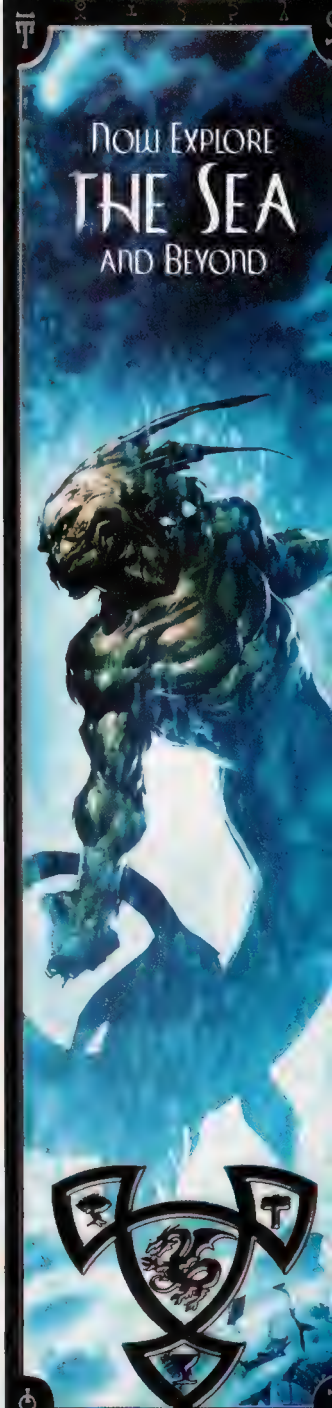
Indeed, the late game seems even more boring than the early game.

A good indicator of what's in store for *Legacy Online* occurred one night when the top-ranked player gave $7 million to each person online at the time. Granted, this wasn't much total money since very few people ever seem to be online, but it's a sign that late in the game, once you have enough money to keep the empire rolling, there is nothing left to do. A capital market, of course, would create a more dynamic economy and reduce the likelihood of such largesse.

It's hard to figure out just who this game is intended for. Newbies will be put off by its glacial pace, and experienced gamers will balk at its lack of vital tools and gameplay elements.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The dearth of vital economic information, lack of a true economy, and repetitiveness make this a tedious exercise at best.



Trials of Atlantis: the latest expansion to the award winning online roleplaying game; Dark Age of Camelot. Explore the ancient ruined civilization, find powerful magical treasure, and discover the Atlantean lore.

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence
MYTHIC™
ENTERTAINMENT
PC
CD-ROM
SOFTWARE

Midnight Club II

It's fast and, dare we say it, furious BY DARREN GLADSTONE

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ROCKSTAR GAMES
DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO
GENRE: RACING
ESRB RATING: TEEN: MILD LYRICS, VIOLENCE
PRICE: $49.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 800, 128MB RAM, 1.6GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB GEFORCE2 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 1.8GHZ, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-8 PLAYERS)

Fans of arcade racing games and reckless endangerment will appreciate how Rockstar Games has taken what it learned from the *Grand Theft Auto* series and used it to deliver a solid driving experience where you're able to blaze at breakneck speeds around Los Angeles, Paris, and Tokyo, ignoring not only the rules of the road, but the laws of gravity as well. Granted, the game's physics range from responsive to ridiculous. (When was the last time you hit the gas off a pier, landed on a barge, then hit a ramp and jammed the nitrous so you could sail halfway across a city?) Still, there's no denying that this game is fun.

As with the *GTA* series, there are large, open areas to speed through, and the level of detail in each city is impressive. The catch, however, is that between the races, free roaming around each city gets old pretty fast. In order to keep the buzz going, you need to look for competition in a series of races. Each race has you progressing through a story line of sorts: Meet people from the underground, get a feel for their personalities and racing styles, and then eventually win their rides.

Rockstar Games has taken what it learned from the *Grand Theft Auto* series and used it to deliver a solid driving experience.

Those familiar with the "sideshow" oeuvre will appreciate the many nods that *Midnight Club II* gives to the underground racing scene. Whether it's the music (techno, or use your own MP3s) or the 28 tricked-out racers, hot rods, and motorcycles you get to handle, *Midnight Club II* seems genuine enough. The vehicles themselves look as nice as the racing world. One minor issue is the glossy sheen of some of the cars and the almost too arcadey approach to damage. When excessively damaged, your car will billow smoke, but once at the point of no return, it remolds to factory-fresh condition.

Superficiality aside, *Midnight Club II* is nicely balanced as an arcade racer, and the game slowly introduces newer elements to the racing genre as you get more comfortable with your ride's handling: Drafting, burnouts, nitrous, transferring the weight of the car in midair, and popping up on two wheels slowly creep into gameplay. Before you know it, the game turns into an over-the-top movielike mad dash. The races get damn tough, damn quick; in fact, you'll be tempted to smash your controller since the A.I. is so vicious. Rest assured that when you do master every back alley and shortcut, you will (just barely) win these races.

Get inventive with back-alley shortcuts to score a win.

Once you unlock everything, or just grow weary of the A.I.-controlled challenges, you can set up your own races with up to eight people over the Internet. It's fun enough finding people to race, but we had two issues here. One, why not support a few more people in an online match? While eight will suffice, imagine 16 people in a rally in downtown L.A. Also, another part of street-racing culture is being able to insult the competition. There's really no reason Rockstar couldn't include voice over IP for midrace trash-talking. That aside, this is a solid arcade racer for those who want to do more than drive around in a circle a couple hundred times.

VERDICT ★★★½

What it lacks in multiplayer, it more than makes up for in fun.

Losing that glossy finish? Better get Maaco!

GAME PATCHES

Revisionist History

C&C: Generals

By Thomas L. McDonal

The most important changes to come out of *Command & Conquer: Generals* version 1.6 are a number of exploit and cheat fixes. Hacks that gave players the ability to access automatic build, upgrade, and generals power buttons have been shut down. Those cheatin' kinds who were hacking the general points in online sessions will have to look for new—dare we say, legit?—ways to win as well. There was also an exploit which enabled those incredibly annoying people who dump a game (usually just as they're about to rack up a loss) to do so without logging a disconnect stat. This was previously possible with the ALT-F4, Control-Alt-Delete, and Alt-Tab combos. Those no longer work. Sorry, folks, looks like EA wants people to have to rely on skill. Damn their black hearts!

Hard changes to the database are minimal: The Anthra Beta upgrade for the Scud Storm now has the correct damage radius; the Gatling tank moves slower when damaged and requires a line of sight to fire; the cost of a MIG has been upped from 1,000 to 1,200, with the armor cost now doubled; and the control rod upgrade for the cold fusion reactor is cheaper. In order to better organize multiplayer matchups, the lobbies have been reorganized by game type (one-on-one, two-on-two, mod maps, noobs, etc.) rather than region. The most welcome addition, however, is the simplest and the one that Westwood had strenuously refused for years: an alternate mouse interface that allows players to use the kind of right-click action interface that's become standard for most RTS games. Now go forth and conquer.

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Endless Ages

The best MMORTFPSRPG yet! BY MARK ASHER

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: SUMMITSOFT
DEVELOPER: AVARIA GENRE: MMORTFPSRPG...SERIOUSLY
ESRB RATING: TEEN; SUGGESTIVE THEMES, VIOLENCE PRICE: $39.95 + $9.95 PER MONTH
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 450, 128MB RAM, 700MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD, 56K INTERNET CONNECTION RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 1GHZ, 512MB RAM, BROADBAND CONNECTION
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

Endless Ages is an "MMORTFPSRPG" according to developer Avaria, which is a confusing way of saying it's a massively multiplayer first-person-shooter-role-playing game. If that's still confusing, think of it as something like *EverQuest* or *Dark Age of Camelot*, except set in a weird game world that mixes fantasy and science-fiction elements and uses first-person shooter combat. And if that's still too confusing, you'll just have to play the game, which you really should, because it's one of the better massively multiplayer games you'll find.

All you need to know about the

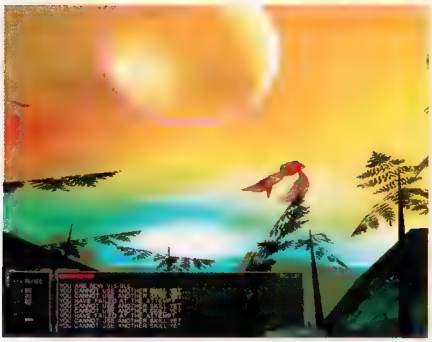
Endless Ages is shockingly good when you consider it was developed by a team of three people.

(cough) "backstory" is that you can play as one of four character types: human male, human female, blobik (big fatso!), or amphibian (frog person). These types of games never have much of a point beyond leveling a character, and *Endless Ages* stays true to that ideal.

Fortunately, the gameplay itself does feel fresh. After playing thousands of hours in (and burning out on) other MMOGs, I was surprised at how lively *Ages'* gameplay feels. It trades the often mindless push-a-button-and-begin-rat-bashing combat scheme in other games for simply aiming and shooting your lasers and other boomsticks at monsters. Being able to dodge, use terrain, etc., ends up making even the mundane combat more engaging—oh, and don't forget you're able to jetpack, à la *Tribes*. It was really cool (and dangerous) to kill a monster that was much stronger than my character by running, jetting into the air, turning and firing, and then repeating the process.

The feature list for *Endless Ages* is impressive. It's a big game world, matched by an equally large underworld that features a 40-mile-long dungeon. The game is stuffed with quests. It has vehicles—pets you summon and ride. It has crafting, player-owned housing, player-controlled stores, arenas for pain-free player-versus-player combat along with a ranking system, PvP outside of the arena, magic spells, and more. It's also skill based, so players can better shape character development. And what's really amazing is that *Endless Ages* was developed by a team of three people. It's shockingly good when you consider that.

Two players pose for the camera, one riding a summoned animal.



A si bat flies as evening falls.

Endless Ages does have some rough edges, however. It's confusing at first, and the game doesn't offer adequate guidance. The graphics engine is dated. Some of the creature art looks like it failed to make the cut for a Dr. Seuss book. There's no way to send a private message to a player, and there's no way to gauge how tough a monster is until you fight it, and probably die. Monsters with ranged attacks are much harder to kill, so players tend to skip them and fight the ones that can only melee. There are game balance issues, and more, but the biggest issue is the small player base. At times, it's difficult to find groups.

Overall, *Endless Ages* is an entertaining ride. If you like massively multiplayer games or shooters, you should really give this one a look. It's idiosyncratic but exciting in a way games like *EverQuest* aren't, and it's getting better. The developers regularly play the game and actively solicit suggestions, many of which are being implemented in an expansion due out later this year. If you play one MMORTFPSRPG this year, make it *Endless Ages*...you'll probably have to.

VERDICT ★★★★

Something new in the massively multiplayer field that's worth a look, despite some rough edges.

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REVIEWINDEX

CGW capsules of recent reviews. Game names in red indicate an Editor's Choice game.

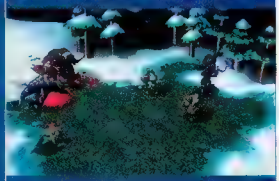
GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Bandits: Phoenix Rising	8/03	Fun FPS dressed up in racing game's clothes	★★★½☆
Big Mutha Truckers	9/03	This big rig game is better than it has any right to be	★★★☆
Black Hawk Down	6/03	Surprisingly fun title emphasizes action over tactics	★★★★☆
BloodRayne	7/03	Mildly distracting, fairly generic, totally tasteless	★★☆☆
Casino Inc.	7/03	Been there, done that business sim with hookers	★★☆☆
Championship Manager 4	7/03	An incredible sports RPG disguised as a management sim	★★★★½
CSI	8/03	Finally, a game for mentally-challenged couch potatoes	★★☆☆
Day of Defeat	8/03	A great squad-based game marred only by age	★★★★☆
Devastation	7/03	Too big to be a mod, too bad to be a full retail release	★½☆☆
The Elder Scrolls III: Bloodmoon	9/03	This solid expansion effectively increases the landmass of *Morrowind* to exceed that of Earth	★★★★☆
Empire of Magic	8/03	This odd RPG both entertains and annoys	★★★☆
Enclave	7/03	20 to 30 hours of gameplay, none of them worth a damn	★½☆☆
Enter the Matrix	8/03	Play it for the movie, don't play it for the play	★★½☆
EVE Online: The Second Genesis	9/03	We'd hate to see the first genesis of this MMO space game	★★☆☆
F1 Challenge '99-'02	9/03	A must-buy for Formula 1 racing fans	★★★★½
Galactic Civilizations	7/03	Triumphs where *MOO3* fails—the best 4X space game in years	★★★★½
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	8/03	*CGW*'s 2002 Game of the Year gets some '80s style clothes	★★★★★
Heroes of Might & Magic 4: Winds of War	8/03	The degeneration continues	★½☆☆
The Hulk	9/03	Best comic-book game not named *Freedom Force* you can buy	★★★★☆
IGI 2: Covert Strike	7/03	This tactical stealth shooter is more special ed than Special Forces	★½☆☆
IL-2 Sturmovik: Forgotten Battles	6/03	The paragon of WWII flight sims	★★★★½
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	6/03	It may look a little funky, but it's definitely worth the effort	★★★★☆
Korsun Pocket	9/03	It sounds like a microwaveable snack but it's the best hex-based wargame ever	★★★★★
Line of Sight: Vietnam	7/03	Keep this lousy shooter out of your sights	★½☆☆
Medieval: Total War-Viking Invasion	8/03	This expansion is a must for *Total War* fans	★★★★½
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	8/03	Criminally sloppy port of a great console game	★★½☆
Neverwinter Nights: The Shadows of Undrentide	9/03	Much better single-player game than the original game	★★★★☆
New World Order	7/03	Just about the lousiest shooter ever	★☆☆☆
The Omega Stone: Riddle of the Sphinx II	8/03	Decent archaeological adventure game	★★★☆
PlanetSide	9/03	Mankind's first persistent world MMOFPS is surprisingly good	★★★★☆
Port Royale	8/03	After a slow start, a quality pirate game emerges	★★★½☆
Postal 2	7/03	No	☆☆☆☆
Pro Race Driver	7/03	Self-proclaimed "CarPG" is utterly lame	★½☆☆
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	6/03	Surpasses the earlier *R6* games in every way to become the definitive tac-sim	★★★★½
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	7/03	Decent console port with finicky camera control	★★★☆
Red Faction II	9/03	Only edged out by *Wolverine* as worst console port so far this year	★★½☆
Rise of Nations	8/03	The latest, greatest historical RTS	★★★★☆
RollerCoaster Tycoon 2: Wacky Worlds	8/03	Delivers the baseline requirements for an add-on for an already dated game	★★½☆
Shadowbane	7/03	A big focus on PvP and city building sets this MMORPG apart	★★★★☆
The Sims: Superstar	8/03	Another solid addition to the planet's best-selling game	★★★★☆
Star Trek: Elite Force II	9/03	Like playing one of the less-compelling TV episodes	★★★½☆
A Tale in the Desert	7/03	Unusual MMORPG perfect for the social gamer exhausted by combat	★★★☆
Tropico 2: Pirate Cove	7/03	This competent city-builder has little to set it apart	★★★☆
Uplink: Hacker Elite	8/03	Intriguing premise and quality execution make this a winner	★★★★☆
Vietcong	7/03	Vietnam shooters finally come of age in this solid title	★★★½☆
WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne	9/03	Some nice new stuff, but you pay in micromanagement	★★★★☆
X2: Wolverine's Revenge	9/03	Save your money and buy the eventual *X-Men 2* DVD instead	★½☆☆

CGW RECOMMENDS

The Elder Scrolls: Morrowind

★★★★★

Of all the games getting expansions recently, this RPG is the least in need of it. *Morrowind* is ridiculously huge, with more possibilities and events lurking within it than your own sorry life. You can play through countless times in countless different ways—if your life were close to long enough.



WarCraft III

★★★★★

The king of fantasy RTS games just got its first expansion with *The Frozen Throne*, but it's not like the game needed new content to be worth your time. This is a supersick game, with outstanding graphics, a good sense of humor, beautifully balanced gameplay, and unrivaled online support through Battle.net. These Blizzard guys just might be going places.

Neverwinter Nights

★★★★★

It's not quite a Lego set, but it almost is...in a hardcore *D&D* kind of way. This graphically sharp RPG has a little bit or miss in single-player, but it shone in multiplayer, and its incredible toolset is still the best for creating original adventures. Thankfully, its first expansion—*Shadows of Undrentide*—finally adds a killer single-player game.

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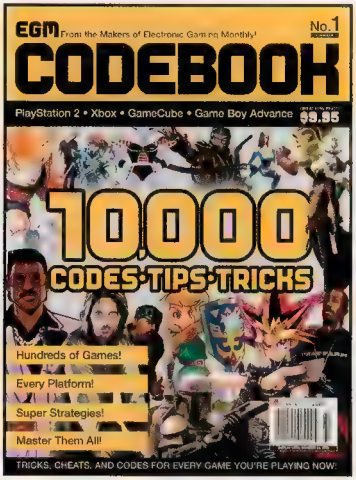

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Falcon Thinks Outside the Box

Get your game on and save your back **By William O'Neal** Photography by Arnold Tiosejo

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER: FALCON NORTHWEST
PRICE: $995

When you think of machines built by Falcon Northwest, three words come to mind: big, expensive, and fast. Their latest creation, the FragBox, drops the first two descriptors while giving gamers a pint-size (14 pounds) gaming rig that is both affordable and quick.

One thing has remained true about PC technology: As time goes by, equipment gets both cheaper and smaller, and this is where Falcon's FragBox comes in. Boasting a lucite case with a handle, the FragBox was designed for the serious LAN gamer. While it's possible to attach a carrying strap (like those made by GearGrip) to a standard desktop PC, there's nothing fun about lugging a 30- to 40-pound tower over to your buddy's basement. At first glance, skeptics are likely to wonder how much power Falcon could possibly cram into a PC the size of a shoebox, but one look at its list of components shows you that this baby is no slouch. At its heart is a 2.67GHz Pentium 4 processor with 512MB of RAM, an 80GB hard drive, integrated 6.1 audio, and a 128MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5600 Ultra graphics card. Yep, all that in that tiny box. There isn't a ton of room for expansion—there's a single open PCI slot and the graphics card is occupying the available AGP slot—but the FragBox wasn't designed with expansion in mind, it was designed for gamers who wish to take their gaming rigs with them.

One thing has remained true about PCs: As time goes by, equipment gets both cheaper and smaller.

We loaded up our typical suite of benchmarks to see how the FragBox holds up under pressure and were pleased. Its score of 1019 in 3DMark2003 at 1280x960 with 4x anti-aliasing and 8x anisotropic filtering turned on is good, considering that it ships with a 128MB GeForce FX 5600 Ultra. Games like *Serious Sam: TSE*, *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast*, and *UT2003* Botmatch all ran well at that resolution, achieving scores of 46, 91, and 31 respectively.

While these numbers aren't as impressive as others we've seen, remember that the FragBox costs around $1,000 and comes equipped with the 5600 Ultra. While Falcon intends it to be a "grab and go" machine, you may want to put in a faster graphics card if you intend it to be your primary gaming rig.

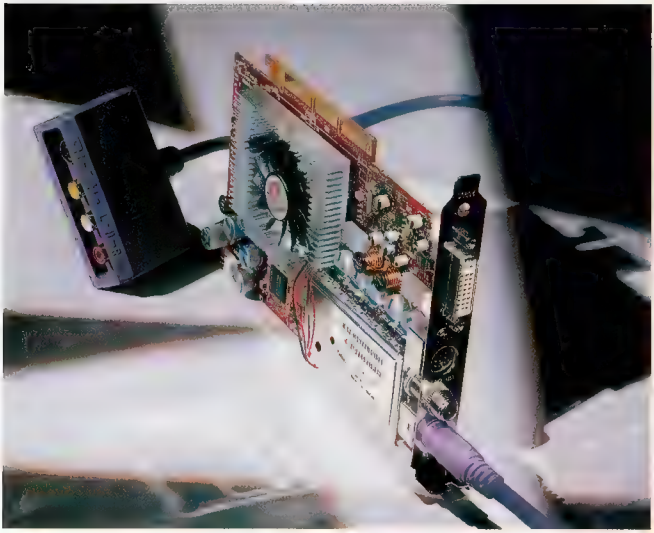
Ultimately, if you're looking for a gaming rig you can take with you, the FragBox is about as close to perfect as you can get. It may not be the fastest machine around, but the thing is very portable and pretty damn convenient.

BY THE NUMBERS

MODEL	FALCON NORTHWEST FRAGBOX
Price	$995
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition
Processor	2.67GHz Intel Pentium 4 (533MHz FSB)
Motherboard	FIC IC-VG61
Memory	512MB DDR 333
Hard drive	HGST DeskStar 80GB hard drive, 7200 RPM
Graphics processor	128MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5600 Ultra
Soundcard	Integrated 6.1 channel audio
Optical drive	16x Sony DVD-ROM drive
Miscellaneous	Four USB 2.0 ports; three 1394 FireWire ports
Speed (Performance)	3.5
Price	4.5
Stability	4
Support	5
Upgradeability	3.5
SCORE	4.1

VERDICT ★★★★☆

It's not the fastest PC available, but I love this machine so much that I'm not sending it back.



The Swiss Army Knife of Graphics Cards

ATI's All-in-Wonder 9800 gives you all the benefits of previous AIW's without compromising graphic capabilities **BY DAVE SALVATOR**

EDITORS' CHOICE
COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER ATI
PRICE $450

Although ATI and Nvidia remain in a pitched battle for 3D supremacy, ATI has held the high ground in the area of "ginsu" cards that can cut through anything—3D and 2D graphics, digital video, video capture, television, and personal video recorder. The latest incarnation of the All-in-Wonder, the 9800, is a product that lets you pretty much have it all, if you can stomach the steep $450 price tag.

Much of the AIW 9800 is unchanged from the AIW 9700, but there are several important new features. ATI has tweaked its homegrown bundled software to include a full-screen user interface (UI) that's TV-friendly. Called EazyLook, it makes navigating through your content easier when viewing your PC's display on your television.

ATI's existing stable of media apps (television, DVD, media player, media library, CD player, video-CD player) all can use the EazyLook UI, although the integration still has some rough edges. In addition, the GemStarPlus+ electronic program guide wasn't integrated into this first version of EazyLook, though ATI will try to integrate it in future versions. Also new is a bundled app called Muvee that allows you to set video footage to music and create a "mix" of the footage that can be synched with the music.

The other new and noteworthy feature is of course the graphics processing unit itself, the impressive Radeon 9800 Pro GPU, which in this AIW configuration is still running at full clock rates of 385MHz/340MHz for GPU and memory clocks, respectively. Because of the equal clocks, the AIW delivers 3D performance equal to that of the Radeon 9800 Pro.

If you want it all, then the All-in-Wonder 9800 is the card to lust after. The combination of mature bundled software, a full-screen UI, a well-designed remote, and excellent 3D performance all come together to create a very cool product that can satisfy the gamer, home theater buff, and video junkie all at once.

VERDICT ★★★★½

A jack of all trades? No way. The All-In-Wonder 9800 is a master of many.

WIL POWER

This RAID stuff is getting out of control!

A reader, I'll call him Steve Dabrowski from Kentwood, Michigan (since that's who he is), sent me an e-mail regarding several of the high-end machines featured in the August issue of the magazine that boasted RAID-0 configurations. According to Steve, "The benefit of a RAID array in the configurations listed is totally worthless. If you have dual 250GB drives in a 500GB RAID-0 array, you have two hard drives that if either fails scroggs your system. You'd be far better off running them as separate drives because if one failed, the other would still hold any data you cared to keep. If you had two 250GB hard drives in a RAID-1 array, you'd have something: a redundant 250GB drive array that gives a second chance at single point disk failures." He then closed his message with some sage wisdom: "Just because you can doesn't mean you should...and just because it sounds good doesn't mean it is."

As much as I hate to agree with people, I have to agree with Steve. People (myself included) have historically used RAID-0 for two reasons: the performance gains and the stupid-ass bravado associated with being able to say, "Dude, I'm rocking dual 250GB hard drives in a 500GB RAID config! Stuess!" The thing is, if you're running a 3.2GHz Pentium 4 with 1GB of DDR and a 256MB graphics card, it's hard to justify the negligible speed gain against the potential failure of the disks. And when it comes down to it, being able to pound one's chest is nowhere near as important as insuring that your data is safe.

Having come to terms with my insecurities, I'm going ahead and changing the RAID-0 configuration in my Power Rig to a RAID-1 config. While being able to brag about a fast *and* secure setup may not excite the uninitiated, those in the know, like Steve, can appreciate the virtue of reliability.

He disappeared five days ago.
He's gotta be on Level 928 by now.

He had good grades. Nice parents. A bright future. But then he built a mind-altering gaming machine and escaped to a different reality. A reality where victory is vastly more important than sleep, food, or piddling distractions like 'the real world.' Good thing he's got our new P160 in his arsenal. Carved out of supremely strong anodized aluminum, our ultimate gaming case packs ten drive bays. A swiveling control panel. And a host of ultra-quiet features including a low-speed 120mm fan and isolated HDD bays. Which should satisfy even the most ferocious gamer. So get a P160. And escape to a more stimulating reality. Now *that's the Power of You.* To view our full line of products, visit www.antec-inc.com.

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Two Grand for a 3.2GHz Pentium?!

iBuypower's latest rig kicks much ass while keeping costs down **BY WILLIAM O'NEAL**

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER: IBUYPOWER
PRICE: $2,195

I'm not sure how they do it, but iBuypower routinely ships machines that—while equipped similarly to those of other manufacturers—are significantly cheaper than the competition. The same holds true for the Titanium-XP rig: At $2,195, this is one of the most affordable 3.2GHz Pentium 4 machines I've had the opportunity to test.

The Titanium-XP mixes prime components with inexpensive peripherals.

Essentially, iBuypower considered the components gamers absolutely need, included them in the Titanium-XP, and went with less expensive components when possible. For instance, the 3.2GHz Pentium 4 processor and 256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra are the fastest parts in their categories, and 1GB of Kingston HyperX will have you gaming for a while. But using a single 80GB Maxtor hard drive along with onboard audio, Monsoon speakers, ViewSonic's 19-inch monitor, and a keyboard and mouse by Mitsuko kept costs down.

BY THE NUMBERS

MODEL	IBUYPOWER TITANIUM-XP
Price	$2,195
Operating system	Windows XP Professional Edition
Processor	3.2GH Intel Pentium 4 (800MHz FSB)
Motherboard	ASUS P4P800 i865PE (800MHz FSB)
Memory	1GB Kingston HyperX dual-channel DDR 400 PC3200
Hard drive	80GB Maxtor 7200 RPM serial ATA
Graphics processor	256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5900 Ultra
Soundcard	Integrated 5.1 Channel Audio
Primary drive	16x DVD-ROM drive
Secondary drive	Pioneer DVR-A04 DVD-RW drive
Monitor	19" ViewSonic E90F+SB
Keyboard	Mitsuko multimedia keyboard
Speakers	Monsoon MH-505 5.1 surround system
Mouse	Mitsuko mouse
Speed (Performance)	4
Price	5
Stability	4
Support	3.5
Upgradeability	5
SCORE	4.3

The Titanium-XP isn't the fastest machine around, but at $2,195, you wouldn't expect it to be. I tested it at 1280x960 with 4x anti-aliasing and 8x anisotropic filtering turned, and its 3DMark2003 score of 2235 shows that this machine is powerful enough to handle any current games as well as the two upcoming games that everyone seems to care about: *Doom III* and *Half-Life 2*. The Titanium-XP's framerate scores of 86 in *Serious Sam: TSE*, 91 in *Dungeon Siege*, and 77 in *UT2003* Botmatch at the abovementioned resolution and settings are also impressive. While the talk lately has been about Canterwood technology, the Springdale motherboard that ships with the Titanium-XP was solid and plenty fast.

Every day, it seems a new kid on the boutique gaming rig block is looking to undercut the big guys. These small outfits come and go, but if iBuypower keeps putting out quality rigs, they should be around for the long haul.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

At $2,195, iBuypower's Titanium-XP is a great machine that regular people can afford.

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Loyd's Cracked Case

Whatever happened to the joystick? By Loyd Case

Recently, I stumbled across the December 1994 issue of *CGW* (issue #125, if you must know). In it was the first hardware roundup I ever wrote for this magazine. But this isn't about tooting my horn. One of the most amazing features about that issue was the fact that Gordon Goble had a roundup of game controllers—eight freaking pages.

Think about that for a second. If Wil O'Neal ever got down and kissed Jeff Green's butt (not that Wil would ever, er, stoop so low) and got eight pages, would we even have eight pages worth of game controllers to write about? There's very little new in the PC game controller world.

Of course, I blame Id Software.

Someone at Id—John Carmack, John Romero, or one of the other geniuses—invented mouselook. Mouselook was probably one of the most brilliant ideas in PC gaming. It also served to seriously damage the market for other game controllers. Almost every PC sold today ships with a mouse and a keyboard. With mouselook, a mouse and a keyboard became the defacto controller for 3D games. After mouselook, only vehicle-based games (flight sims, space combat sims, and various armored combat titles) really benefited from a joystick. And as *Freelancer* demonstrated, even a space sim works well with a mouse, if the design is robust.

It's not just joysticks that have disappeared, however, and it's not just Id's fault.

Back in the mid '90s, a lot of people put a lot of brain and sweat equity into developing innovative and unusual controllers. Some, like the Titans Sphere, were ill conceived, while others, like the SpaceBall six-degrees-of-freedom controller, were cool but had a steep learning curve.

Today, though, any innovation in controllers is mainly in the console space—and even then, it's not all that innovative. Dance pads and virtual skateboards are sorta cool, but when it comes down to it, they're ultimately one-trick ponies. Others, like the Essential Reality P5 glove, really haven't quite found that killer application. There are also a couple of head trackers that you wear on a headband for flight sim visualization, though for the life of me I can't figure out how to use them without cramping my neck.

Check out what's commonly available and: the same set of controllers from Microsoft, Logitech, Saitek, Thrustmaster, and CH. The prices change, the cosmetics change, but the song remains the same. Mouselook killed a lot of innovation in the game controller market because it's so good at what it does.

Would Wil ever get down and kiss Jeff's butt for eight more pages?

If Dean Lester, who now heads up Microsoft's DirectX efforts, has his way, there will be even less innovation coming your way on the hardware side. Lester envisions a standard DirectX-certified game controller that would be designed in the same manner that console gamepads are today. Every gamepad has the same base set of functionality that behaves in exactly the same way. Games are designed specifically to be controlled by the standard controller, with more elaborate controllers being optional.

On the surface, this is an interesting idea. The software interfaces would be more homogeneous, too, so that developers could easily build in robust controller support. I'm unconvinced that having a standard hardware controller is necessarily a good idea, however, particularly if that "standard" controller is a game pad. I don't know about you, but I like the fact that PC games are different from console games. I really don't want the PC turned into some sort of glorified game console.

However, creating a robust software interface that works in a manner that's easier than DirectInput to design for and code is probably a good thing. If Lester's idea is to have a set of standard controllers—such as a standard game pad with standard number of buttons, standard joystick/throttle combination and standard wheel, then he might be onto something.

I got into PC gaming on flight sims, though I haven't booted up a flight sim in the past few months. However, I recently dusted off my old Sidewinder 3D USB stick for *Battlefield 1942*. Using the mouse to control the aircraft in *Battlefield 1942* is an exercise in frustration, but using the joystick for flying in the game just rocks. In fact, having the stick sitting there has got me itching to unwrap this copy of *IL-2 Sturmovik: Forgotten Battles* that's been sitting on my desk.

ILLUSTRATION BY ELIZABETH BRANDT

Tech Medics

You've got questions, and everyone seems to know more than Wil **By William O'Neal**

Which graphics card should I buy?

I'm looking to upgrade my 64MB GeForce2 to a DirectX 9-compatible videocard. My goal is not to spend more than $150 and still be able to run *Half-Life 2* well. What kind of performance differences can I expect from a GeForce FX 5200 versus a 5600? (Does that extra 128MB really make a huge difference?) Or should I not worry about DirectX 9? I think flipping a coin might be in order. Heads for the GeForceFX 5200 and tails for the Radeon 9600 (the two cheapest DX9 competitors).

Karrd

While the GeForce FX 5200 is DX9 compliant, that's about all that it has going for it. The 5600 is a decent graphics card. In fact, the new FragBox from Falcon uses it. As far as the Radeon 9600 is concerned, it's far superior to the GeForce FX 5200. If those are the two choices, then get the Radeon 9600.

Which LCD should I buy?

I am looking at buying an LCD monitor that's good for gaming, and I have my mind set on getting the Hitachi CML174B. However, I am now comparing the CML174B with some other LCDs like the ViewSonic VP171b and NEC MultiSync LCD1760NX. All have analog/DVI-D capabilities and 16ms pixel response. What I don't know is if a larger dot pitch like 0.29mm is better than a smaller dot pitch like 0.264mm and if a Contrast ratio of 500:1 is better than one of 400:1. Loyd's Cracked Case (July 2003) and your review (April 2003) has helped some. Can you please tell me what is better, larger or smaller?

Mike Souz@

Loyd thinks that pixel size probably doesn't matter and a higher contrast ratio is definitely better. Just make sure the monitor maker isn't lying.

Again, which graphics card should I buy?

I was wondering how I could upgrade my computer without spending too much money. I have a 1.3GHz Pentium 4 with 640MB RAM, a 40GB hard drive, and a 32MB videocard running Windows ME. I was thinking that I could get the ATI Radeon 9000 Pro 128MB and add a 60GB hard drive. Many of the games I play appear choppy even when all the graphics options are at the lowest settings. Hopefully you can tell me what I can do for less than $300.

Alfonso

I don't know what kind of graphics card you have, but judging by the amount of memory, I'm guessing it's something like a GeForce MX. Also, with 640MB of RAM, that 1.3GHz Pentium may not be at the end of its rope. It's close, though. And lastly, that 40GB hard drive should be fine. I'd suggest getting something like a 128MB Radeon 9600 or 128MB GeForceFX 5600. You should be able to pick up one of those cards for less than $200. I'd save that additional $100 for the motherboard, CPU, and memory upgrade you'll inevitably have to do soon.

Don't forget to wipe!

I would like to build a new PC (case, motherboard, memory, CD-RW, etc.) but want to use the hard drive from my current PC, which is running Windows XP Home. If I load the drivers for the new equipment onto the old hard drive, would I then be able to take that hard drive out and use it in the new PC?

Mark

It's theoretically possible. I've built new machines and just plunked an old hard drive that already had an OS installed on it in the new machine. While it's worked, it's never worked as well as wiping the hard drive clean and reinstalling the OS fresh. I would install the old hard drive, wipe it clean, and do a fresh OS install.

Laptops are the bomb

I am looking into getting a laptop strictly for pleasure. I am trying to find out what laptops would be the best for video-games and Internet surfing.

BrOOkLyNsPaPiJeW

I like Dell and Toshiba laptops. If I were you, I'd get whichever one of those has the fastest graphics card, either ATI's 64MB Mobility Radeon 9600 or Nvidia's 64MB GeForce FX 5600 Go. You may also want to invest in a wireless broadband setup. I'm currently using Belkin's 54g wireless gateway and router with my DSL at home and I love it.

The skinny on 3D GameGauge 3.0

Where I can find the 3D GameGauge 3.0 you guys use?

Koen

Go to ExtremeTech.com. You can find out everything you want to know about 3D GameGauge 3.0 there.

ILLUSTRATION BY SUPERCORN

Killer Rigs

The ultimate recipe for building the ultimate gaming rig

By William O'Neal

I wish these hardware guys would come out with something new and innovative. But that said, what's a guy to do? My Power Rig hasn't changed much. Of course, it was pretty fast to begin with. Intel recently released its 3.2GHz Pentium 4 processor (800MHz FSB), so I replaced my not-so-old processor with that one. Not surprisingly my benchmarks were essentially the same as before. Similarly, I'm still pleased with my little Lean Machine that could. It hasn't changed much, but it's still a solid bare-bones machine.

I've gotten a lot of feedback recently from people criticizing the prices I quote. They all say essentially the same thing: "Hey bro, where do you get those prices? I configured your Lean Machine for like $800." Sure, I could surf the Net for the lowest prices available for each component, but ultimately, that's not helpful. Think about it, who wants to build a machine culled from parts from a dozen or so e-tailers? Not only would the shipping costs be outrageous, but some companies will have items on back order while others will get them to you the following day. You think it's bad having to wait to download drivers to use your new rig? Imagine waiting two or more weeks for your motherboard to show up. I get my prices from Pricegrabber.com and try to choose the same e-tailer for each product. And that e-tailer isn't necessarily the one with the rock-bottom prices.

Sure, I could surf the Net for the lowest prices available for each component, but ultimately, that's not helpful.

POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Professional Edition	$300
Processor	Intel 3.2GHz Pentium 4 (800MHz FSB)	$700
Case	Antec PlusView 1000AMG	$100
Power supply	Antec True Blue 480 (480 watts)	$100
Motherboard	Intel D875PBZ Intel 875P chipset	$180
Memory	1GB Kingston HyperX KHX3500 PC3500 DDR	$350
Hard drive	Dual 120GB Seagate Barracuda SATA drives in a 120GB RAID 1 configuration	$400
Graphics processor	256MB GeForce FX 5900 Ultra	$500
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2 Ex Platinum	$250
DVD/CD-RW drive	Plextor PlexCombo 20/10/40-12A DVD/CD-RW combo drive	$150
Monitor	22" NEC MultiSync FE2111SB	$600
Speakers	Cambridge MegaWorks 610D	$300
Keyboard	Microsoft Cordless Desktop Optical	$25
Mouse	Microsoft Cordless Desktop Optical	$55
TOTAL		$4,110

LEAN MACHINE

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	$200
Processor	AMD Athlon XP 2200+	$100
Case	Antec Lanboy	$100
Power supply	300-watt SmartBlue on-board power supply	N/A
Motherboard	ASUS A7N8X-Deluxe (nForce2)	$140
Memory	512MB Corsair XMS PC-3200 DDR	$150
Hard drive	40GB IBM DeskStar 7200RPM	$80
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9600	$200
Soundcard	On-board nForce2 5.1 audio	N/A
DVD/CD-RW drive	16x Sony DVD-ROM drive	$40
Monitor	19" ViewSonic E90fb	$225
Speakers	Creative Inspire 2.1 2500	$45
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard	$25
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Optical	$45
TOTAL		$1,350

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNO_D TIOSEJO

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EVERYONE
E
ESRB

Gamer's Edge

Everyone was much less edited by Dana Jongewaard

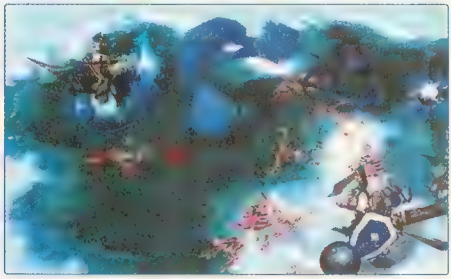
DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

Congratulations, Chris—you are the proud recipient of *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. If you'd like to win a free copy of *Tron 2.0*, send your nastiest cheat for multiplayer in a recent game to cgw_letters@ziffdavis.com with a subject line of "Dirty Trick."

WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE

By Tom Chick & Bruce Geryk

Tom's pit lord and lone ghoul get to creeping greens early.



Bruce's archmage gets by with a little help from his Water Elementals.

We should start with a disclaimer: We aren't very good at *WarCraft III*. We lose on Battle.net. We're strictly amateurs. We don't know which guys do what kind damage against which other guys. What's more, we play at the slow speed. To you hardcore players, this might read like a comedy of errors, like two guys playing chess who know how to move the pieces but manage to fumble perfectly good checkmate opportunities.

The map we chose is Hail Stone, a four-player map that's not so small that it forces early encounters and not so large it gives both players free rein to build up without fear of an attack. The players start in the corners, protected from frontal attacks by a forest. The only green (easy) creeps are opposite each player's forest wall: a single gnoll warden and two gnolls. To the right of each starting position is a tavern; to the left is a secondary gold mine, guarded by a handful of gnolls and their level 5 overseer. The centerpiece of Hail Stone is a walled fountain of health, guarded by a level 10 blue dragon and a half-dozen mid-level ogres and trolls. There are gold mines immediately north, south, east, and west of the fountain of health. Also in the middle of the map there are a pair of goblin laboratories, each guarded by an ogre magi and a pair of ice troll berserkers. Finally, along the outer edge of the map, there are several powerful groups of ogres and trolls.

Bruce

Tom offered to let me win our game if I agreed to play the Elves. I declined. The Humans are a nice balanced race suited to my indecisive style of play in that they are quite flexible. They also have units like footmen, riflemen, knights, priests, and sorceresses, which are easy for me to remember. What is a glaive thrower, anyway? It sounds like something I use on my lawn.

Tom

WarCraft III takes a lot of meticulous micromanagement, quick thinking, and crackerjack timing. This is good news for me because Bruce's reflexes have been dulled by years of reading books and playing wargames.

My experience with *WarCraft III* is that it's usually best to have a very specific and specialized strategy. Since I know Bruce gets flustered during big battles (he'll send chat messages like "This is insane!" any time there are more than six guys fighting on screen), I'm going to resort to one of the tried-and-true Undead strategies, the necromancer/meat wagon combo, a.k.a. the skeleton flood.

The idea is to field a bunch of necromancers, put their Raise Dead spell on autocast, then bring in two or three meat wagons filled with corpses. Once the necromancers are full on mana, a quick press of the Drop All Corpses button for the meat wagons will unceremoniously dump out the corpses, at which point the necromancers go to work and flood the battlefield with skeletons. If I get time to research Skeletal Longevity for longer summoning periods and Skeletal Mastery for *Frozen Throne*'s new Undead mages with their ranged attacks, all the better. I start the game by telling Bruce, "Hail Stone is my home. I will show the world that I can be its master. I will perfect my own race of people, a race of Undead supermen which will conquer the world!"

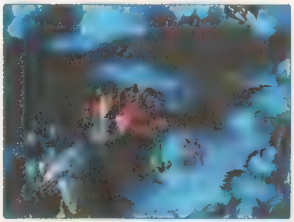
Bruce

I think Tom is role-playing that he is a member of Bauhaus. The big problem with that is that Bela Lugosi is dead.

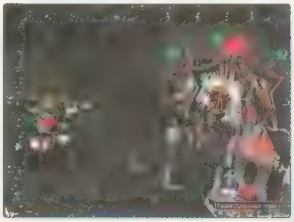
It turns out I'm in the upper left corner. As the Humans, I like to start with an archmage. With a full store of mana, he can cast Summon Water Elemental twice, giving me two powerful units. This makes a big difference in the early battles. To round out my starting army, I'll build a pair of footmen before setting out.

Tom

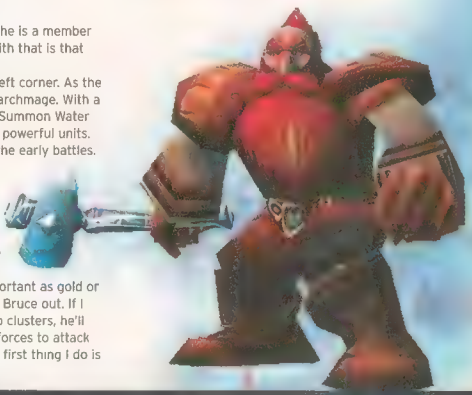
The game starts with me in the southeast corner. Since creeps are a resource every bit as important as gold or lumber, I'm going to try to shut Bruce out. If I can rush to get the green creep clusters, he'll have to wait until he's built up forces to attack an orange creep cluster. So the first thing I do is



With his Howl of Terror, the pit lord grabs Tom an early second gold mine.



The goblin shredder lets Tom's ghouls go out to play.

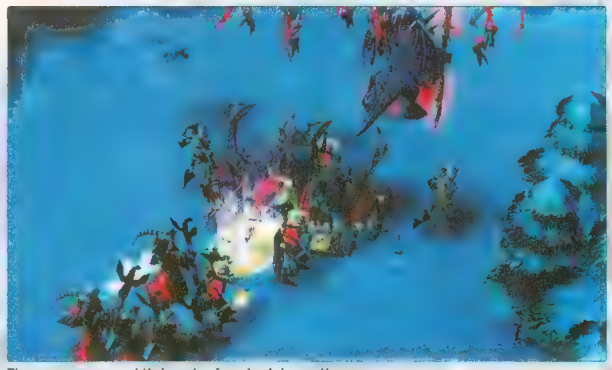


run a ghoul to the tavern and recruit a pit lord. This unlikely pair then makes a beeline directly for the greens. The pit lord's Howl of Terror reduces enemy damage during the encounters, and he and his ghoul sidekick handily defeat their gnoll opponents. The first two gnolls are easy, the third is touch and go for a bit, and the fourth, which is near my base, kills all my ghouls and leaves the pit lord on his own. Nevertheless, mission accomplished. I've creeped the greens and gotten my hero halfway to the third level.

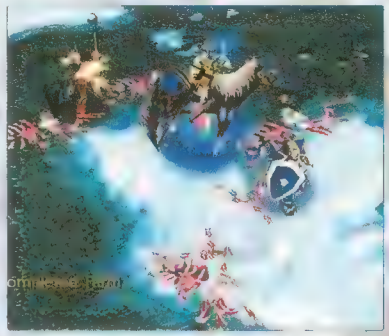
Bruce

Knowing exactly when to attack creeps is a difficult balancing act. Attack too soon, and you lose your units and have to make up for an early setback. Attack too late, and the creeps may not be there because your cheating opponent named Tom Chick may have already killed them. The man has no respect for other people's creeps. This is exactly what I discover when I send my army to kill the easy group of creeps near my base.

On to the next order of business while I build up my army, which is to figure out where Tom's base is. During the first night I send a peasant to the goblin laboratory in the center of the map to pay for Reveal. Tom is in one of the four corners. On my second attempt, I hit paydirt and find him in the opposite corner from me. To keep track of what he's doing, I'll buy both available mechanical critters from my arcane vault. These little guys, who are new to *Frozen Throne*, are inexpensive scouts disguised as harmless wildlife. They're slow, have a limited line of sight, and can be killed easily, but unless your opponent is actively on the lookout for enemy sheep, they can run around unmolested.



The necromancers and their carts of carrion bring up the rear.



The priest and his magic fingers tend to Bruce's archmage.

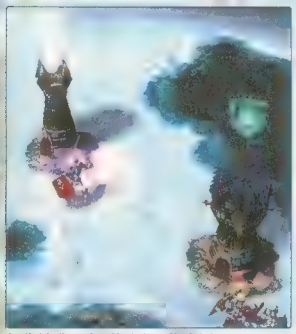
Tom

While my pit lord rests up, I send another ghoul to one of the goblin laboratories. After the middle of the first night, a goblin shredder will be available, which is just what the Undead doctor ordered. These guys are great for gathering lumber. They're too expensive to be of much value to the other races, but the Undead really benefit from having their ghouls freed up to fight battles rather than gather resources.

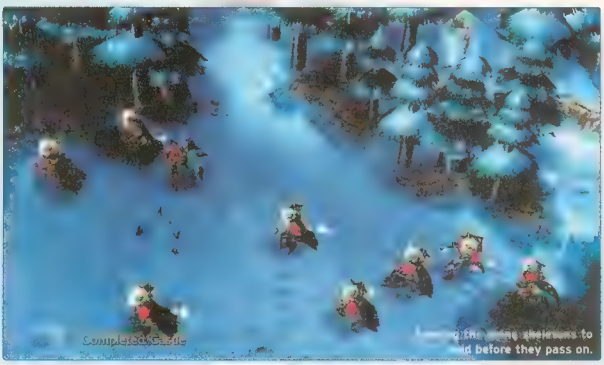
The mainstay of my army will be gargoyles, which the first *Frozen Throne* patch reduced down to tier 2 units. I can train them once I've upgraded my necropolis to the halls of the dead. Gargoyles are flying units, which means many of the map's gnolls, trolls, and ogres can't hurt them. I'm concentrating my graveyard upgrades on Creature Attack and Carapace to boost the gargoyles' stats. I'm not going to bother with the Unholy Strength and Armor upgrades for the skeletons, since their strength will be their numbers.

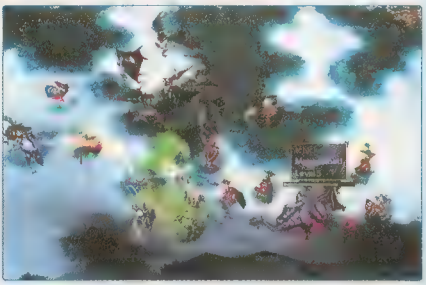
Bruce

One of the first things you'll want to do when you play this game is to upgrade your town hall to its second level to open up more building and unit options. This also lets you recruit your second hero, which gives you the advantage of flexibility, not to mention more room to carry and use hero items. For Humans, the third-level upgrade (castle) is essential, because only then can you build your big flying units.

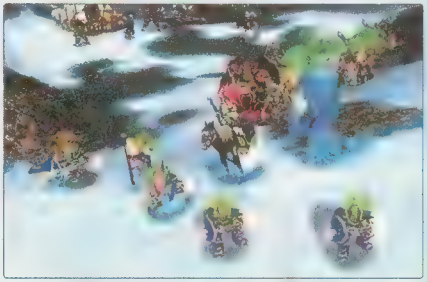


A slight diversion that does its job by distracting Bruce.





An "oops!" battle begins with Tom bringing up skeletal reinforcements.



And the "oops!" battle ends with Bruce fleeing.

My basic hero tactic is a mountain king for frontline melee combat and an archmage for spellcasting support. To maximize each hero's unique contribution, you should pick just two of his abilities and improve them until he hits Level 6, at which point his ultimate ability is unlocked. My archmage is focusing on Water Elementals and his Blizzard attack, while the mountain king is improving his Bash ability and Thunder Clap to emphasize his direct combat role.

No matter what race you're playing, healing is an important part of *WarCraft III*. It's something every player has to take into account. The faster you can recover from a battle, the faster you can get into the next battle. This means you can kill creeps before your opponent or you can follow up on a victory sooner. Humans can easily manage healing with a priest or two whose Heal spell is set to autocast. I build these first and then add in a pair each of sorceresses and spell breakers.

Tom

Bah, lame creep drops so far. I have a crystal ball, so now I see both where Bruce is and where the locations of a potion of greater healing and a few manuals of health are. My level 4 pit lord appreciates the extra hit points, but I was expecting something more dramatic from the orange creeps.

I have a second gold mine starting up. I've got a couple of basic necromancers tagging along with my pit lord, but I'm spending most of my resources upgrading their powers and getting a few meat wagons parked near my graveyard. They're loading up on rotting flesh until I can research Exhume Corpses for the ability to have the meat wagons automatically refill themselves with their sweet, sweet cargo of carrion.

Bruce

I'm using heroes to drop scout towers around map, but these are too frail in the later game to be worthwhile, even when they're upgraded. Still, it's quick and it should annoy Tom. I have a few mechanical critters running patrol patterns. You hit the Patrol button, hold down Shift, and then click on the gold mines in the minimap. The critters run the waypoints in a circuit. Any gold mine Tom tries to haunt will be recorded on the minimap as a hostile building. The critters are slow but thorough.

Tom

As my necromancers call up skeletons during creep battles, I send the summoned warriors off toward Bruce's second gold mine, which I found with my crystal ball. These skeletons, since they're summoned, are temporary units that will disappear after a while. They might as well live out the rest of their short unlives in futile diversionary attacks.

Bruce

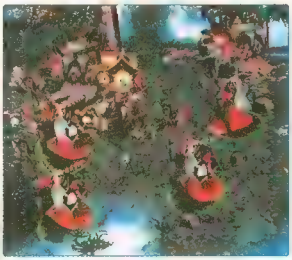
Tom's pathetic skeletons don't kill a single one of my peasants even when I neglect to press the Militia button on my town hall. But the distraction of clicking over to keep an eye on what was happening was enough to get my vulnerable archmage killed by an ogre magi. Then, in my panic to figure out what was going on, I got my mountain king killed. This is a catastrophe, all brought about by a simple diversionary attack that—to Tom—probably appeared to have been useless. Distracting your opponent is a worthwhile endeavor, because if he's reacting to you, he can't be micromanaging his heroes, which is what much of the game is about.

Tom

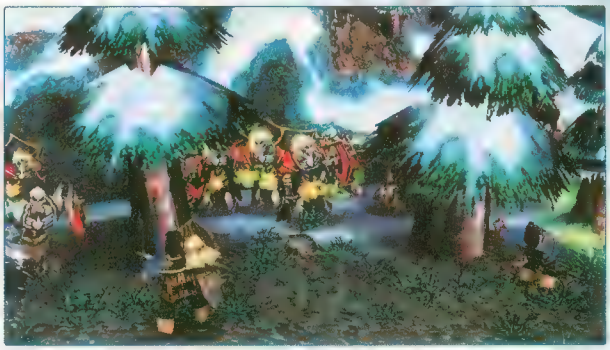
My pit lord has hit level 5, so he can't advance any further through creeping. Time to park near Bruce's second gold mine. The plan is to take it out and then keep him bottled up until his main gold mine is depleted, at which point, I can pick off his defenses at my leisure. Unfortunately, we bump into each other as I'm on my way. These sorts of "oops!" battles are often where *WarCraft III* is decided.

Bruce

I ran into Tom's forces and thought I had it made. His only ground unit was his hero, who



The necromancers and meat wagons advance through the remains of Bruce's forest.

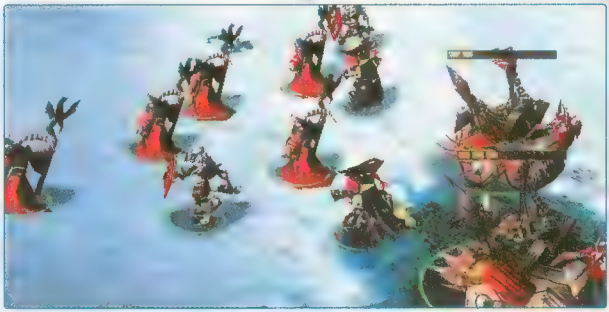


Where there used to be a forest, there's now an open approach for Tom's skeletons.

was accompanied by about a half-dozen gargoyles. Most of my units couldn't attack the gargoyles, so instead they piled on his hero. My priests and sorceresses got killed pretty quickly by the gargoyles, but my knights and footmen were chipping away at his hero when suddenly a bunch of skeletons showed up from nowhere. I had to use my Scroll of Town Portal to get out of there. In my excitement, I totally forgot to use my Red Drake Egg, which could have tipped the balance against his flying units. I never remember to use my special hero items!

Tom

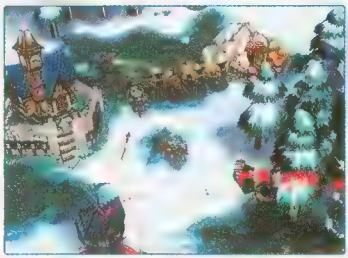
I won our first battle, largely thanks to the pit lord's ability to soak up massive amount of damage, and helped in no small part by that yummy potion of Greater Healing. Mmm, nothing like the taste of 500 extra hit points in the midst of a close battle. By keeping the meat wagons and necromancers far behind in a support role, I have the equivalent of a mobile base ready to pour in reinforcements as needed. The only problem is that my production is limited by the necromancers' mana, so I have to wait for it to replenish. After Bruce ran away, I sent all the skeletons to his gold mine.



Bruce scouts Tom's necromancer/meat wagon team.

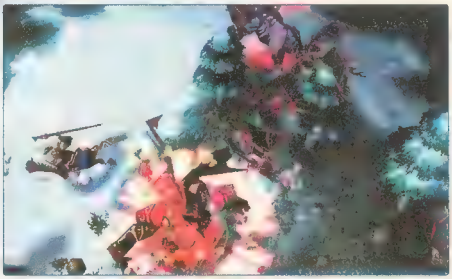
Bruce

I took too long expanding to my second gold mine, which Tom is now harassing. I haven't had the time or resources to build



This time, there are enough skeletons to hit harder.

Once the doom guard arrives, it's all over but the cryin'.



The doom guard does his War Stomp while the archmage heads for the hills.

up substantial defenses. There's always something else to build, or research. The temptation to screw around should be absolutely resisted. Don't get distracted—go get a second gold mine! Then get a third.

I'm trying to buy time to build up some flying units to counter those damn gargoyles. Dragonhawk riders with their ability to ensnare flying units with Aerial Shackles would help. Gryphon riders with Storm Hammers would also be a great counter to all those damn skeletons. Time for a pair of aviaries.

Tom

While the skeletons beat up on Bruce's hapless peasants, my meat wagons make short work of the few towers Bruce has built at his second gold mine. Then it's a pretty simple matter to send in the gargoyles to mop up. Even if his peasants convert to militia, they can't touch the gargoyles.

Bruce's expansion gold mine is shut down. You can get a sense for how much gold your opponent has left in his starting gold mine by looking at your own. I'm down to just over a thousand gold, so his should be empty soon. It's almost time for the coup de grâce.

Bruce

I have a mechanical critter tagging along with Tom's slow meat wagons, which is where he's keeping his necromancers. He has five of them back there. If I can do an end run around his hero with a few spell breakers and maybe my archmage, I can take out the necromancers. The spell breakers' Feedback damages mana users and the archmage's Blizzard is perfect for clusters of ranged attackers. Unfortunately, I lack air cover against his gargoyles, and my gold shortage is keeping it that way.

Tom

Rats, I forgot to build a sacrificial pit to make shades for scouting. My crystal ball is taking too long to recharge, so I can't rely on it for new intelligence about his army rebuilding progress.

But no matter. In almost no time at all, I have a swarm of skeletal warriors and skeletal mages pouring through the denuded forest in front of his base, hacking and zapping at peasants, while the meat wagons sling chunks of diseased meat at his buildings and the gargoyles swoop

One of Bruce's dragonhawk riders arrives, but he's too little too late.

overhead, running down his two low-level heroes. My pit lord finally gets his ultimate ability and quickly pops Doom on some poor near-dead peasant, who dies and splits open to spawn a doom guard. The doom guard stomps through a few militia, rains fire on a lone peasant just for the hell of it, and starts bashing Bruce's undefended buildings. Oh, the humanity! Bruce resigns before I get time to gloat

Bruce

I made several bad mistakes in this game, the worst of which was losing my heroes to creeps, which should have lost me the game right there. Not expanding fast enough let Tom catch me with an underdeveloped second town, which should have had more defenses. Upon reflection, maybe I should have taken the Elves.

How To...

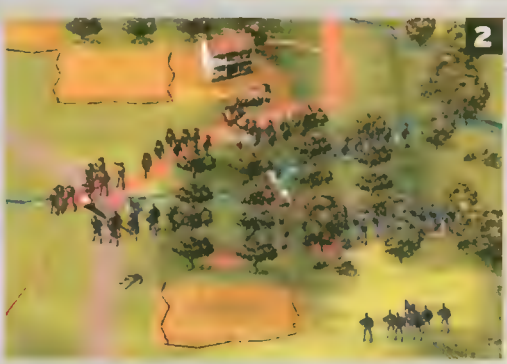
COLONEL BOMBASTS' DISSERTATION ON MILITARY TERMINOLOGY

Socializing for nerds By Di Luo

Whenever anyone wants to sound military in a game or TV show, the word "flank" always seems to come up. What the heck does it actually mean and how do you use it in a game to crush your enemies? Here's a graphically enhanced dictionary on various methods of conducting an offensive and their application to virtually any strategy game.

THE ATTACK

The defender has many advantages. He can hide in trenches, build pillboxes, and he has internal lines of communication which allow for the easy flow of supplies and reinforcements. So why attack? If both sides sat on their butts waiting for the other to attack, no war could be won. The attacker also has the initiative. He can choose where to be strong and where to attack. A successful attack can send the enemy reeling, disrupt the plans, and cause panic amongst its commanders. With well-planned and well-coordinated attacks, the German army during the early years of World War II was able to route enemies of comparable size and equipment. The following are three traditional methods of attack.



THE FRONTAL ASSAULT

The bees do it, the birds do it, and even your grandmother can do it. This is the most time-honored method of fighting. You simply group your mob together and fling it at the enemy head on. The defender usually has the advantage of ground and fortifications (think going over the top in World War I), so you'll end up with heavy losses. If you have sufficient numbers, though, you can break through the enemy line, widen the gap, split his army in two, and threaten his entire army with destruction. At the very least, you'll drag the enemy into a bloody battle of attrition to drain his resources. Frontal assaults should be used when time is of the essence or if you're playing the traditional RTS that generally distills war into affairs of attrition favoring the stronger economy. If you must husband your resources, however, this is worse than doing nothing.

FLANKING MANEUVERS

Flank, flank, flank. You hear the term all the time, and all it really means is the side of something. Since battles are often about having more firepower than the other guy, if you wrap some of your troops around the extreme ends of the other guy's line, then you will bring several units together to attack that one unit. Once you destroy the unit at the end of the line, you can "roll up" along the enemy and repeat the process along the entire front. The enemy will usually be forced to retreat to protect his line of communications (rear) and keep his army from being completely surrounded and utterly destroyed.

However, unless you take the enemy by complete and absolute surprise, flanking only works if you have laid down a base of fire. You need a good number of troops in front of the enemy to tie him down so he can't shift troops to the threatened flank. If you send your entire army around his line, he can very easily move his army to match you or even get behind you and turn the tables. Flanking maneuvers should be considered whenever possible and generally work in more tactically focused games like *Rise of Nations* or the *Total War* series. If the enemy line is anchored by impassible terrain like mountains, consider massing troops at one edge of the line for a frontal assault to create an artificial flank.

DOUBLE ENVELOPMENT

A [illegible]

The basic concept is the same as a flanking, but you do this by wrapping your troops around both sides of the enemy line. Instead of simply crushing him and rolling up, the point is to race your troops around the rear to completely cut the enemy off, surround him, and bag the entire army as POWs.

Sounds great, doesn't it?

Unfortunately, flanking on both ends means that you will be weaker everywhere and if the enemy reacts in time, he can smash the components of your maneuver piecemeal. If the enemy has a reserve, he might even counterattack and surround the troops that you sent around his rear and turn those into his latest pool of forced labor. Only do this if you are confident of your superior numbers at the battle.

RESERVES

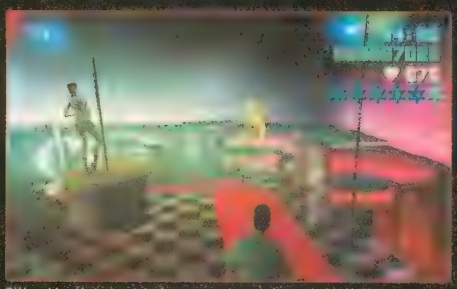
One thing that many players forget when trying to attack is a strategic reserve. Fighting another human being is not the same as whooping on the hapless A.I. Humans will react, and your opponent will most likely counterattack your weak spots. If your attack succeeds, it's often useful to have rested troops go in to exploit the breakthrough further. A reserve is simply a body of troops kept behind lines in a central location where it can respond to any contingency quickly.

GTA: VICE CITY

Part two of the comprehensive guide to everything vice

By Chet Faliszek & Erik Wolpaw

Here's nothing like a steel pipe to break up a wholesome drug deal.

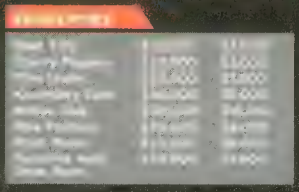


Either hire Yoda to strip for you or do not. There is no try.

From this point forward, accessing new missions will require you to purchase revenue-generating properties rather than the simple safe houses available in the first part of the game. Once purchased, these commercial properties will only start earning you regular income after you've completed a series of missions specific to each business.

Once you've finished a given business' missions, you can collect its earnings by running over the dollar sign that will periodically appear somewhere on the property. Eventually, the mere act of grabbing the dollar sign will be too much hassle for an important, wealthy crime lord like you. In all honesty, it's probably beneath you right off the bat. At first, however, you should swallow your pride, add routine collection runs to your schedule of violent mayhem, and then use the money to purchase more businesses.

Here's a list of the properties available for purchase, each one's price, and the daily revenue you'll begin to receive once all the missions for that property have been completed. Note that the Sunshine Auto Show Room will begin generating partial income before you finish all of its associated missions.



Even though it won't earn you any money, Hyman Condos on the north side of the second island is must-purchase property. It's the best save-spot in the game. Experience pride in ownership and walk to Hyman Memorial Stadium from this luxury suite in which European elegance abounds. On top of all that, this property features three parking bays (each of which can comfortably accommodate a tank) and a roof garden tastefully appointed with a helicopter. At $14,000, it's a steal. Though since buildings are one of the few

Finally, your henchmen do some dirty work.

You will get a warning that only two cars can fit into this garage. Ignore it.

things in *Vice City* you can't actually steal, you'll have to pay for it. As an added bonus, there's a police star right in front of the main entrance and a change of clothes on the roof, making Hyman Condos a perfect home for anyone whose busy lifestyle involves a lot of panicked running from the cops.

Now that your housing and income needs are handled, it's time to discuss buying weapons. Actually, it's time to discuss stealing weapons. Why spend your hard-earned pimping, arson, murder, and general blowing-things-up income when your tax dollars are already being used to buy guns, bigger guns, and guns mounted on helicopters? Just visit the Fort Baxter military base on the second island and help yourself to the items that, when you think about, are pretty much yours in the first place.

Since the Army won't necessarily see things from your perspective, make sure you visit their base in a heavy vehicle, like a fire truck. Beforehand, practice running over pedestrians and then backing up over them, because you're going to use that skill a lot during any trip to army headquarters.

If you want to spend some nonviolent time with these military men, just pick up the cop uniform from the police station on the first island, and the soldiers won't bother you while you run around their base. Going deep undercover as a cop is especially useful if you want to steal the Army's Rhino tank (which appears once you've collected 90 packages) or grab the amazing Hunter attack chopper that appears after you reach 100 percent on the game's completion rating.

If you murder them, the loyal henchman that

The Cherry Popper factory will now generate revenue up to a maximum of $3000. Make sure you collect it regularly.

Soon enough, this $3,000 won't even be worth your precious time.

staff your income properties are another good source of pistol ammo and cash. You probably won't need pistol ammo or cash, but since they're just freeloading off your fearsome reputation, you might as well make them earners.

Generally speaking, garages are only designed to hold two cars. To fit more vehicles into one, pull your car up so that it's touching the door, then pop out of your car and right back in. The garage door will open and you can drive into the garage and park before it closes. Your extra cars will now be saved.

Do civilians ever learn? It clearly states I want to kill police only.

Can't find enough people to buy your product? Just ram a passing motorcyclist to make a new customer.

During the Hit the Courier mission, we suggest you hang back from the docks. Unless you like shooting miniskirt-wearing women in the head—in which case, get close.

Mission strategies

Film Studio/Porn Empire missions

The film studio series starts with the mission Recruitment Drive, which is pretty simple. Follow the pink dot to find Candy Suxxx. She will work for you only if you knock off her "agent." Ignore the henchmen he leaves at the scene and go after the car. Once it's destroyed, just go back and pick up the girls.

Next up is Dildo Dodo. Simply follow the markers to complete the mission. It's best to start at the northernmost point first and then work your way down.

Martha's Mugshot is also simple. At the photo shoot, grab the chopper, follow the limo, land on top of the hotel across from your target, and then snap the pictures. As soon as you do, your wanted level will jump to 5 stars! Luckily, you have a helicopter. Jump back into it and fly back to the studio. Completing the mission will automatically drop your wanted level, so you don't have to worry about a dangerous trek back to a save spot.

The final mission, G Spotlight Image,

can be a nightmare if you play it as it was apparently designed. Happily, if you abandon the expected path, it's one of the simplest missions in the game. Your job is to adjust a spotlight in order to advertise your film. You need to start the mission as it was designed. Bring the motorcycle to the top of the building and make the first jump out the window onto the adjacent building. You can try to make the next few jumps, but why bother? Instead, hop off the building. Both the police helicopter and the news chopper are close by. Grab either one of them from their respective roofs and complete the mission by following the guide beacons and "jumping" from roof to roof in your helicopter.

Cherry Popper mission

Once you buy the ice cream factory, all you need to do is sell "ice cream" to 50 people in order to begin earning money from this property. The easiest method is to change your point of view so you get the distant shot of your truck. Then, while you're selling the goods, just stay in one spot until you get a star. Finish up with any current customers, and then just move a little bit–about 20 feet should be enough. This will permit your wanted level drop timer to start up, even if you start selling product again. The distant view will help you notice any cops that might try to sneak up on you while you're pushing product. Repeat this stop, sell, move 20 feet. Keep cycling through this until you reach your 50th satisfied customer.

Print Works missions

In Spilling the Beans, your new employee tells you he can make counterfeit money, though to do so he needs plates. Simple enough. Go to the Malibu Club and have Kent Paul tell you where to get info on some plates. For that, you must board a ship that's lousy with armed hoodlums in order to reach another magical pink spot. As you board, the guards will spot you. Don't worry–just make a dash for the front of the ship and then climb to the upper decks. Once you get the information, don't bother battling your way down. Simply make a leap for the dock from high up on the bridge. You can run across the street and grab some armor if the fall injures you. Then head back to the Print Works. Stop at the hotel pool by the Sunshine Auto Show Rooms to pick up a bazooka (or extra ammo if you already have the bazooka).

Think you're safe escaping in a police helicopter? Think again–it's Grand Theft Joost.

The top floor of Sunshine Auto is a great place to lure tanks.

There's nothing worse than bringing home your new toy only to find it won't fit in the garage. (Bonus hint! You can store it in the Hyman Condos' garage.)

Next up is Hit the Courier. In this mission, you need to head back to the dock and wait for a courier's helicopter to land. Make sure you have a solid, speedy vehicle before you start the mission. You can drive by the docks but don't bother getting too close, as you'll only end up in a gun battle with the courier's gun-toting posse of hot chicks. You'll be tempted to fire the bazooka at the landing area as the courier gets in her car. Don't, though, since you'll most likely just destroy the plates. Instead, let her car and the cars containing her bodyguards start to leave the docks. Using the bazooka, blast the bodyguards' vehicles, and then give chase to the courier. If you picked a tough, fast car, you can race past her and start blasting cars along her path, which is an almost straight shot down the main drag. As she approaches, start shooting her car. The moment she abandons the vehicle, you can light it and her up with your bazooka. The plates will survive. Just pick them up and head back to the print factory. If all this bazooka action raised your wanted level, don't

This fed car makes a nice ride, plus it permits you to run vigilante missions in style. (It's also one of the few cars that the pay-n-sprays won't paint.

forget that there's a pay-n-spray along the main drag on the way back to Print Works.

Last mission!

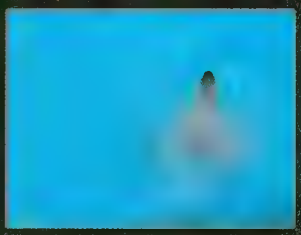
Vice City's final mission is easy once you know the secret. We're not going to tell you the name of the mission because Chet forgot to write it down. Our incompetence, however, is kind of a blessing because as we vaguely remember, the mission name gives away a big plot twist. You don't need to complete every sub-mission to get to the final battle.

A phone call starts the last mission. Before you head to the mansion that's your eventual target, make sure to arm yourself with your favorite weapons and, in case grenades aren't one of your favorite weapons, some grenades.

The final fight takes place inside the coke baron's mansion. Your first goal is to protect the safe. Duck next to the desk and fend off the attackers. Eventually, you'll be forced to give chase to a certain somebody. Instead of pursuing your target upstairs, run down a nearby flight of stairs, and you'll find a storeroom with new armor plus some explosive goodies. Grab everything and run to the roof. Open fire on the conveniently placed explosive barrels. Ignore the gunfight that's going on around you and run to the top of the helicopter pad. From there, lob grenades back onto your pursuers. You can take your sweet time about it, since they'll be busy taking the scenic route to killing you by attempting to blast a path through the impenetrable cement walls of the pad. Game over. Roll credits. And roll and roll and roll credits. After making such an awesome game, the designers must have been all tuckered out at the end because they forget to program the Escape key to escape out of the credits. The strategy here is don't look at the screen.

Once you get the Hunter attack chopper, vigilante missions are a snap, so why bother? Shoot innocent civilians instead.

Finally, a vehicle that's up to some boat hunting.



You can try, but you can't shoot down the blimp.

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PC MAGAZINE

THE INDEPENDENT GUIDE TO TECHNOLOGY

Scorched Earth

Requiem for a Dweeb

Scoot, we hardly knew ye... By Robert Coffey robert_coffey@ziffdavis.com

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

No. No, I probably should not, considering the fresh air and sunlight-phobic nature of the pasty Morlocks "peopling" the *CGW* masthead. Besides, this is an occasion that calls for an elegy more than a sonnet because the unthinkable, the unimaginable has occurred: Scooter is leaving...the miserable little bastard.

Complete and total abandonment—that's the thanks we get for raising him from a li'l Scooty pup to his current approximation of manhood. We take him in as an energetic, eager, socially stunted intern, and six-plus years later, when we've finally transformed our de facto mascot into a slothful, jaded, profoundly socially stunted member of our editorial team, the little creep decides, "Hey, I should spread my wings and soar upon the winds of my most deepest dreams." Yeah, well, good luck, you quisling.

Admittedly, by working here, Scooter has suffered more lasting damage than a late-stage leper playing dodgeball, but one editorial staff's systematic emotional torture is another editorial staff's emotionally undeveloped version of affection. You've got your tough love, and you've got your unbe-friggin-lievably barbaric potentially criminal love, and guess on which side of that splintery fence the *CGW* braintrust resides? Hey, like O.J., we hurt because we just care too much. So you see, Scoot, that's why we wanted to put you in a Speedo and spray-paint you Goldfinger-style for our awards issue that year. That's why we mandated the "Design Scooter's Hair" contest. That's why we've referred to each of your girlfriends as Scootina. Hey, if we didn't like you, we would've banished you right after your internship was up—you know, like we did with Chim-Chim. But instead, we kept you on and gave you all the crappy jobs we possibly could and still, inexplicably, you stayed. And in your own quasi-human way, you blossomed.

But you've finally opted to leave the nest. A little bit anyway—after all, you're just moving down the hall to *Official U.S. Playstation Magazine*. Talk about jumping from the cesspool into the chemical toilet.

Well, it's our loss and *OPM*'s gain. Who will do our work now? Who will gnaw the corns from our misshapen feet? Who will comb Darren for fleas? Probably the same parade of faceless transients and runaways we relied upon before you arrived, but I digress. Besides, those losses pale in comparison to our greatest loss, the snatching away of the single largest database of completely useless knowledge known to (demi)man: the Scootiematrix. We could hire 12 score to replace you and yet even they wouldn't be able to mechanically recite every obscure bit of movie trivia, anime arcana, game history, game and movie release dates, comic book lore, and, most important, *CGW* game ratings as you. We ask you what score did *Meat Puppet* receive, and you blurt out, "Four rather undeserved stars." Ask Jeff Green the same question and he grins, says "Cake," and then unleashes a long quivering string of drool. Now we're going to have to actually look stuff up. Thanks, buddy, thanks a lot.

Well, you can take the Scootiematrix with you, but you can't take your name. That, my former friend, is copyrighted *CGW* property and it stays right here. But we aren't about to shove you out the door naked—we'll come up with something new, something that'll sting in ways "Scooter" never did, something you'll never get away from. After all, you took an appallingly diminishing nickname and through some unfathomable alchemy turned it into one of the most respected and recognized names in the gaming biz. Somehow, Scooter became a name synonymous with "integrity, intelligence, and professionalism" instead of "giggling nincompoop." You twerp, how the hell did you do that?

Well, let's see you do the same trick with Li'l Cindy. Ha ha! Not so easy is it? Oh, better yet, what about Señor Peanut? Wil O'Neal? No no no, I've got it, I've got it: Hot Pants. Hot Pants Nguyen.

Sigh Or maybe it's finally time we started calling you Thierry. Good luck, man. There's a hole at the heart of *CGW* that no one's ever going to fill.

Who will gnaw the corns from our misshapen feet?

ILLUSTRATION BY JON WAYSHAK

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